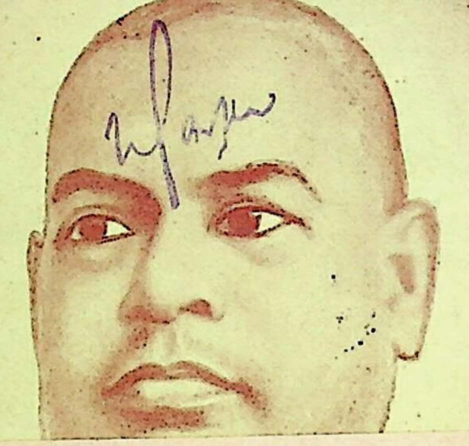

"Oh what a steadfastness to the Ideal did we ever find in Sashi! He was a Mother to us. It was he who managed about our food. We used to get up at three o'clock in the morning. Then all of us, some after bathing, would go to the worship room and be lost in japa and meditation. There were times when the meditation lasted to four or five o' clock in the afternoon. Sashi would be waiting with our food; if necessary, he would by sheer force drag us out of our meditation. Who cared then if the world existed or not!"

— SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

The STORY of A DEDICATED LIFE

U. Fazzi

The Story
OF
A Dedicated Life

BEING THE BIOGRAPHY OF SWAMI
RAMAKRISHNANANDA A DIRECT
DISCIPLE OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

SRI RAMAKRISHNA MATH
MADRAS

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PREFACE

A noble stir waved up in India in 1897, on Swami Vivekananda's return from the West after accomplishing his great work there. The Promethean Evangelist of Sri Ramakrishna had announced in his mighty voice the coming of something vital, good and great. The world stood on the tip-toe of expectation, little knowing at that time, as to who were going to be his actual standard-bearers, the poineers of the movement that he had promised.

Before the passing away of Swami Vivekananda, there arose worthy stalwarts at his behest from behind the munificence of his greatness. These were his brother disciples, who had been trained along with him by his own Guru to work out his mission in this world. To-day the world knows them, but not yet fully. And without knowing these great ones fully it is impossible to have any real comprehensive idea of the vastness of Sri Ramakrishna's greatness.

It is with the idea of understanding the Master, a little better, that we have attempted here a study of the life of one of his children, Swami Ramakrishnananda. Him, Swami Vivekananda called, 'the main pillar of our Math'. He is the *Vasuki*, who held the Ramakrishna Order on his hood before it could find home in the hearts of men.

Swami Ramakrishnananda passed away in August, 1911. After that many events have flowed down the arch of Time. Oblivion has played its part in human memory. So in writing this life we had mainly to draw upon from the documented reminiscences of the senior Swamis and the many good old friends of the Order, who had had the opportunity to know the Swami by intimate personal contacts. We tender them our sincere thanks.

The manuscript of the book was carefully gone through by Sri D. S. Sarma, the Principal, Vivekananda College, Madras. We thank him for his goodness.

Lastly we thank our philosopher friend, Prof. P. N. Srinivasachari who has kindly written the introduction to the book.

While presenting the book to the public on the occasion of the GOLDEN JUBILEE CELEBRATION of the RAMAKRISHNA MOVEMENT in South India, we submit with humility, that, inspite of our best efforts to make the book authentic and exhaustive, it is not possible to reveal completely all what a spiritual stalwart of the like of Swami Ramakrishnananda is in essence. It is time alone that will finally unfold the real greatness of a man who was truly great.

14th February, 1948
Madras

THE PUBLISHER

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*

INTRODUCTION

When I was called upon by the President, Ramakrishna Math, Madras, to write an introduction to the book, *The Story of a Dedicated Life*, I naturally felt diffident on account of my unworthiness; but it was a call to remember the great apostle of Sri Ramakrishna to the South, which in itself is an act of purification. So in spite of my diffidence I essay the following lines by way of recollecting my days of youth, hallowed by the contact of the saint whose feet I was fortunate to touch.

If Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa is a Divine Incarnation, Swami Ramakrishnananda is the very personification of *Guru bhakti*. The Paramahamsa, as the teacher of the age, is the consummation of the spiritual aspirations of the world religions today. His life reveals the truth that the best proof of the existence of God is the direct experience of God. Spirituality is not only a personal realisation but a power that can transform others. The very touch of Sri Ramakrishna turned sinners into saints. His magnetic personality attracted the brilliant intellectuals of Bengal, steeped in western agnosticism, and transformed them by his strange alchemy into world moving Vedantins. They taught the gospel of spirituality and the service of God in man. South India has been for centuries the home of orthodoxy and Vedantic dialectics and Swami Ramakrishnananda was chosen by Swami Vivekananda as the most suitable apostle to teach the new gospel to the South.

Sashi Bhushan as the Swami was called in his earlier life was born in Bengal in 1863, in the very year when Narendranath or Swami Vivekananda was born, in a conservative Brahmin family and was brought up by his parents in the rigid ritualistic atmosphere created by their *tantric* worship. But influenced by Lord Gauranga's teachings in his early life, he took to strict vegetarianism. His College career was brilliant and his intellectual gifts showed a rare combination of mathematical subtlety, metaphysical profundity and Sanskrit scholarship. Even in his boyhood he showed signs of spiritual hunger which was whetted by the teachings of Keshub Chandra Sen, the great Brahmo leader. But it was only the Master who fully satisfied it. He met the

Master in the company of Sarat in 1883 at Dakshineswar. Soon he came under his magic spell, gave up his studies in the B. A. class and renounced all worldly attractions, like those of lust and lucre. In his over-powering devotion to the *Guru* whom he revered as a Divine Incarnation, all secular attachments entirely dropped away from his mind and he began to prefer *Guru-bhakti*, even to Mukti. He sat at the feet of the Master from 1883 to 1886, the year of his passing away into *Maha Samadhi*, after which he dedicated himself with absolute selfless devotion to his service. After the passing away of his *Guru* on the Christmas eve of 1886 the young disciples of the Paramahamsa led by Swami Vivekananda, the St. Paul of the new dispensation, took the vow of *Sannyasa*, formed into a monastic order and dedicated themselves to the spread of the twin ideals of spirituality and service which is a harmonious blending of asceticism and activism. Swami Ramakrishnananda kept vigil over the sacred relics of the Master, maintained the monastery and took care of the monks by serving them like a loving mother.

When Swami Ramakrishnananda came to Madras in 1897 he was warmly received by Alasinga Perumal, M. C. Nanjunda Rao and others. He was put up at the Ice House on the beach road sanctified by Swami Vivekananda's stay. In the later days of his stay owing to want of accommodation in a small out-house of the Ice House, he was put to much inconvenience. In 1907 a building was constructed in Brodies Road, Mylapore, and the Swami's joy knew no bounds when he moved into the new house with his Guru Maharaj. In his monastic life in the Ice House and the Math, he was austerity itself. The worship of the Master was the Centre round which his whole life revolved. Like his Master who communed with Kali in the Dakshineswar temple, he felt the Master's living presence in the shrine. The picture of the Guru was Guru himself, and not a likeness, a mental construction, or a symbol. The Puja transcended the conventions of prayer and praise as it was a personal communion leading to devotional ecstasy. It was a spiritual education to see the Swami with his big bulky body doing the worship of his Guru. He never touched money, shunned worldlings delighting in fault finding and flippant talk and avoided the company of women. He was a strict disciplinarian especially in the training of the inmates in the monastic Order and at the same time he was full of love and laughter to them.

The work of the mission grew side by side with that of the monastery. The history of this growth and of the Swami's part in it, the book has dealt with in detail. I shall only say that but for his ceaseless and devoted service the Mission would not have been what it is today.

In 1910 the Holy Mother came on a pilgrimage to Madras and the Swami threw his heart and soul into the service of the Divine Mother. Owing to the incessant toil for fourteen years, the Swami's health broke down, and in 1911 he went to Calcutta for medical treatment. In spite of the acute physical suffering his mind was resigned and it reposed at the feet of the Master and Holy Mother and he entered Maha Samadhi in August 1911. The leading citizens of Madras in a meeting at the Pachaiyappas' college mourned the loss of Swami Ramakrishnananda.

The teachings of Swami Ramakrishnananda bring out the catholicity of the ideals of the Mission embodied in his unique methods of exposition. He was, true to his Master, an integration of the three traditional paths to Perfection—Jnana, Bhakti and Karma. But the overtones in him were those of Bhakti. The attitude 'Not I, but Thou' was the predominating note of his personality.

In his religious and devotional moods he showed how deeply he was moved by bhakti as taught by Gauranga and Ramanuja. Religion, he said, takes man to God by making God of a man, and such godliness is every man's birthright. His devotional exaltations and ecstasies very often burst the bounds of conventional religion and they were like a storm after a calm. He was generally self-possessed and had the philosophic serenity of a *saksin* or spectator, viewing things with detachment. But when bhakti overpowered him the scene completely changed and he became God-intoxicated. Self-stripping leads to infilling by God. At one time when he stood before the image of Dakshinamoorty in Tiruvanmiyur temple, his feelings gatherd momentum and changed into fervour and frenzy. The manifestation of Krishna-prema like, tears pouring down the cheeks, tremor all over the body and thrills, were fully evident in him. The Devotees were visibly moved and irresistibly drawn into the current and also began to sing and dance. Thus in religion he preferred Bhakti to Jnana and he became an ardent admirer of Ramanuja, whose life and teachings he expounded in Bengali. He specialised in the study of the *Bhagavata* and his work, '*Sri Krishna, The Pastoral And King Maker*' bring out the intensity of his Krishnaprema.

He was a model teacher even according to modern standards and with his deep psychological insight he could discern the aptitudes of his pupils and students and adjust his teachings to their needs. But it was in his public lectures and classes to the young intelligentsia of Madras and in his published works that he was at his best as a mathematician-Metaphysician. In his teachings which tendend towards monistic idealism or Advaita he often utilised the methods of Berkley, Kant, Descartes and Sankara. It is a transition from the worship of 'Thou' to the realisation of 'I' and samples of his subtle thinking is given below: (1) The universe of space and time or *nama-rupa* does not exist apart from our sensations. (2) They are only forms of the mind; the sensations, unified by the mind, the ego or I. (3) I think, therefore I am. The Atman is thus self-proved. (4) There is only one I in the world and it is infinite and there cannot be two infinites. The 'I' is thus one without a second. Zero and infinity are one and so the smaller than the smallest is the same as the bigger than the biggest. Every one seeks happiness in the senses, but it is only in us. It is eternal and the self is eternally happy or bliss itself. Reality or Brahman is thus *Sat-chit-ananda* or eternal life, infinite wisdom and absolute bliss.

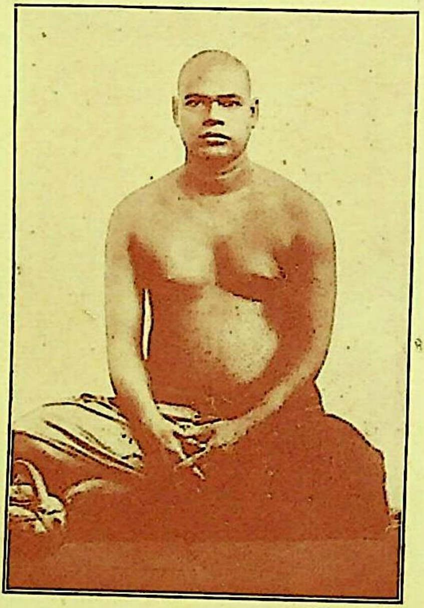
The Swami was fond of solitude and silent meditation and he used to say now and then that congregational worship is a contradiction in terms. As a contemplative or a Jnani he would retire into the inner sanctuary and think of God-head as *Sat-chit-ananda*. He used to say that aloneness led to fearlessness.

Swami Ramakrishnananda's life was thus a model of Bhakti and Jnana in the personal and impersonal aspects. To him Brahman is the impersonal personalised by love. When *Sat-chit-ananda* is solidified by love it becomes the personal God and there is no difference between *para bhakti* and Jnana: Sugar is sweet and it is immaterial whether one wants to taste sugar or be sugar itself. To him dualism and non-dualism could exist side by side and live at peace. Each kind of mukti is perfect in itself. While enjoyment is ideal of dualism, freedom is the ideal of non-dualism and both are sublime. The Swami practised all the yogas and found that they led to the same goal. Bhakti is mukti concretised and enjoyment and freedom are the same. He was a conservative liberal: In outer life he conformed to the tradition; in inner life he was a revolutionary and he regarded Buddha, Jesus and Mohammed as *avataras* of God.

With a simple unostentatious nature, ascetic austerity and inwardness and intuitive contact with Guru and God he was essentially a saint who radiated his spirituality wherever he went, but at the same time he worked incessantly for the welfare of humanity, and spent himself in their service. His life was thus a harmony of asceticism and activism, theism and monism. Swami Vivekananda and he were in some respects complementary and contributed to the many sidedness of the Mission. The former was a brilliant orator who moved large audiences but the latter was at best in his classes and debates. The former disseminated Vedanta to all people but the latter confined his teachings to a few people and adapted them to their requirements. The former was a jnani without and bhakta within, but the latter was a bhakta without and jnani within. But both taught the same truth though they differed temperamentally and both were chosen by the Guru and accepted by him. The strength of the Mission consists in the practice of the principle of unity in variety and of a healthy understanding and acceptance of other points of view, which are indeed the desiderata of modern life and thought.

13th February 1948.
Mylapore: Madras.

P. N. SRINIVASACHARI.



SWĀMI RAMAKRISHNANANDA

CHAPTER I

CULTURAL CONFLICT OF YOUNG BENGAL IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

THE cultural chaos that darkened India in the nineteenth century cast its gloom first over Bengal. It is well known that it was in this province that Britain established its first stronghold in the last quarter of the eighteenth century and then slowly strode over the rest of the country. Calcutta, the chief city of the province, remained the metropolis of British India for about a century and a half. India's political subjection to Britain was responsible for the onrush of European thought and culture into Bengal. This onrush was felt all over Bengal with increasing intensity from decade to decade.

With the advent of the British, the English language and literature were introduced into the educational institutions of Bengal. The tastes and standards of European society rapidly came into vogue and soon became the fashion among the young. Alexander Duff, David Hare, Carey and a host of Christian missionaries came into the country in the wake of the British flag and materially helped in the spread of European education and culture. They had their headquarters at Serampore, a place not far away from Calcutta. The college of Fort William, started in 1800, accelerated this influx of an alien culture. The English educated youths of the province, particularly of Calcutta, became so enamoured of European standards of life and society that they began to ape the West with a feverish zeal. Prof. S. Radhakrishnan rightly observes that the educated Indians of the nineteenth century turned more English than the English themselves.

As the English thought of the nineteenth century was dominated by rank atheism and scientific materialism, young Bengal turned agnostic and lost faith in its cultural heritage. Hundreds of educated men readily surrendered to the foreign culture and unashamedly wallowed in their slavery. They were so carried away by the glamour of Western civilisation that they adopted outlandish conventions of food, dress, speech and manners.

The tide of Westernisation started in Bengal and then deluged the whole land. This resulted in a marked leaning towards Christianity, the faith of the rulers. Christian missionaries criticised Hindu beliefs most unjustly while preaching the message of Jesus Christ. They preached in the market-places and to the passersby at the street corners. They distributed hundreds of copies of the Bible among English-reading people for leisurely perusal. The *Padres*[1] publicly decried bathing in the Ganges, worshipping of images and other Hindu religious customs as meaningless superstitions. Once a certain *padre* in the course of his preaching threw a clincher at the Hindu audience. " What can your idol do if I strike it with my stick?" he asked. An enraged listener promptly retorted, " What could your Christ do when he was crucified ?" The missionaries carried on their fanatical tirade in season and out of season, but the public dared not fight them as they belonged to the ruling race, and were patronized by the rulers. This crusade of the missionaries gave rise in Bengal to a general feeling that: 'The *padres* had come to destroy our caste and religion'. This cultural invasion had an appalling effect on the mind of the subject race. Dinabandhu Mitra, a Bengali dramatist of the century in his drama, '*Sadhabar Ekadasi*' makes one of the characters say humorously. " I read English, talk English, speechify in English, think in English and dream in English."

Similar propaganda against Hinduism went on vigorously throughout India. Missionaries appointed as professors of colleges denounced Hinduism before Hindu students. The British Bible Society presented copies of the Bible to successful students in the Matriculation, Intermediate and Degree examinations. The Bible was also taught as a textbook in schools and colleges. This led to the conversion of hundreds of Bengali youths to the Christian religion. Promising Bengali youths like Lal Behari De, author of *Folk Tales of Bengal*, Madhusudan Dutta, the great poet, and Krishna Mohan Banerjee, a scholar, adopted the Christian faith. A network of Christian institutions backed by the British Government was organised all over the country and a wave of Christianisation swept over the land. Already the backbone of the nation had been bent almost to the breaking point by Muslim rule and culture for about seven hundred years. The last straw came from the western impact which broke the back of Hindu culture and religion. The nation staggered and tottered and finally lay prostrate.

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[1] The word '*Padre*' has a slightly different connotation when used in the West.

The first reformer of the centuary was Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who tackled all the crying problems—social, educational, and religious and left everywhere the impress of his mighty intellect. Though he denounced the image-worship of the Hindus as utterly inconsistent with the highest form of spiritual practices yet he gave a rational interpretation of Hinduism justifying the wisdom of the Hindu sages. He keenly felt the insolence of the missionaries who attacked Hinduism and engaged himself in fighting the battle of Hinduism against them by speeches and writings. He did quite a lot in defence of Hinduism and checked for a time the proselytising activities of the Christian missionaries. He appeared at a time when the Moghul Empire was crumbling and the new foreign power was looming large on the horizon. "Ram Mohan Roy," says Romain Rolland, "was an extraordinary man who ushered in a new era in the history of the ancient continent and the first really cosmopolitan type in modern India." Towards the end of 1830 he was given the title of Raja by the Emperor of Delhi and sent as his Ambassador to England where he died in 1833. In fact, as his English biographer, Miss S. D. Collet, puts it, the Raja saw the New England being born out of the heart of Old England and in him the New England first became acquainted with the New India. "The little life, the little stir, that we see in India today," observed Swami Vivekananda, "begins from the day when Raja Ram Mohan broke through the walls of national exclusiveness and went abroad to compare notes with other nations. He devoted his whole life to helping India u various ways and set a wonderful example before us."

Ram Mohan was a champion of the freedom of the press, the father of modern Bengali prose and the founder of national journalism. His unbounded enthusiasm and indefatigable energy found expression in a campaign of many sided reforms such as the prohibition of polygamy, the remarriage of widows, the education of women, the abolition of *Sati*, the establishment of Hindu-Muslim unity, inter-caste marriage and the spread of English education. Though he laid the foundation of all the principal movenments and tried to solve almost all the problems of the day that pressed for solution, the crowning glory of his life was perhaps the founding in 1828 of the Brahmo Samaj which carried on his mission throughout the country in northern India, particularly, in Bengal. He studied the Vedas, the Koran, and the Bible and formulated a religion of eclecticism. Count Goblet D'Alviella in his *Contemporary Evolution in Religious Thought* remarks that the Raja delighted to pass for a believer in Vedanta with the Hindus, for a Christian among the adherents of that creed, and for a Muslim among the followers of Islam. Ram Mohan and his Brahmo Samaj may be said to have first introduced into Modern India the spirit of religious toleration. In the words of Miss S. D. Collet, Ram Mohan stands in Indian history as the living bridge over which India marches from her unmeasured past to her incalculable future. He was the arch which spanned India's gulf that yawned between medieval superstition and modern rationalism. He embodies the new spirit that arises from the compulsory mixture of races, religions and cultures in India ".

But Ram Mohan was not unfortunately absolutely free from Western bias ; so he zealously advocated the spread of English education in Bengal. He started in Calcutta, an Anglo-Hindu School at his own expense for the English education of Hindu boys. It was in this school that Maharshi Devendranath, his successor and the second leader of the Brahmo Samaj, had his early education. In spreading English education he co-operated with Lord Macaulay who was of the opinion that a shelf of English literature was worth more than all the literature of India. As Macaulay believed that English education was sure to destroy the faith of the young students in their past, he strongly recommended the introduction of English education in Bengal. At his instance in 1835, a Government resolution was passed for the adoption of English education in British India, more than a year and a half after Ram Mohan's death. As Swami Vivekananda observed, Ram Mohan's advocacy of English education pushed India's forward march backward at least by half a century.

After the demise of Ram Mohan his mantle fell on Msharshi Devendranath Tagore who as leader of Adi Brahmo Samaj continued the unfinished mission of the Raja. Devendranath was followed by Keshab Chandra Sen, Pratap Chandra Mazumdar, Shivanath Sastri and a number of other Brahmo leaders. The contributions of these leaders to the renaissance of Hinduism are invaluable. Keshab who seceded from Devendranath and founded a new sect of the Brahmo Samaj, held Christ and Christianity in greater veneration than his two predecessors, Ram Mohan and Devendranath, and almost threw himself into the arms of the Christian Church. His leaning was so pronounced that he publicly welcomed the Salvation Army of the Christian missionaries. The Christian element which Keshab introduced into the Brahmo Samaj could not be set aside even by the members of Sadharan Brahmo Samaj who seceded from him. "Even today the mode of worship in the Brahmo Samaj", observes D. S. Sarma,[2] "resembles that in a Christian church to such an extent that it has given rise to the popular saying that Brahmoism is Christianity minus Christ."

Having rejected Vedic authority and denounced the old orthodoxy, the Brahmo Samaj became organically weak without any religious canon for its authority. Pandit Sitanath Tattwabhushan, a veteran Brahmo missionary, admitted this and said,[3] "Brahmaism, we confess, is outlandish; it is Musalman or Christian in respect of the highly practical, spiritual, iconoclastic turn it has given to the old Theism of India. Our old monotheistic religion was good enough as an affirmation, a thesis; but it sadly needed a negative and antithetical turn. This the Brahmo Samaj has given it; and in this consists its main contribution to the religious development of India." Though Ram Mohan was a reformer and the founder of a new religious movement yet he remained "a zealous Hindu, proud of India's past, proud of the achievements of his race and was eager to conserve all that was good and great in his ancestral religion." What he truly wanted was a radical removal of the crying abuses of Hindu society. He confessed in his Autobiographical Sketch that the ground which he took in all his controversies was not that of opposition to Brahmanism but to a perversion of it. He retained the Hindu mode of meditation in the Brahmo Samaj which consisted of contemplating God with the help of the *Gayatri Mantra* and some texts from the Upanishads and some explanatory verses followed by a hymn of the *Mahanirvana Tantra*. At the time of his death he was heard to mutter '*Om*', the mystic syllable so sacred to the Hindus. But Devendranath, a Brahmin by caste, widened the gulf between the Hindu society and the Brahmo Samaj by casting off his sacred thread. However, in spite of his rationalism and monotheism he remained a conservative Hindu, retained some Hindu customs and usages in the Adi Brahmo Samaj and nourished his spiritual life almost entirely with the Upanishads. But it was Keshab and his companions who alienated the Brahmos totally from the orthodox society. They became more Christian in their belief and outlook and enthusiastically studied the Bible and hailed Jesus as the Prince of Prophets. His chief lieutenant, P. C. Mazumdar, depicted Christ as an Eastern prophet in his *Oriental Christ*. In order to impart a cosmopolitan character to his church, Keshab compiled a book with passages from all scriptures, Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Muslim and Chinese. His biographer, P. C. Mazumdar, says that eclecticism had been the philosophy and faith of the Brahmo Samaj ever since it denied the infallibility of the Hindu scriptures. This separated the Brahmo Samaj completely from the mother church and cut at its very root. Thoughtful Brahmos found out this blunder of their leaders subsequently when it was too late. Pundit Sitanath Tattwabhushan in his autobiography says. "The discarding of Vedantism by the Brahmo Samaj under the Maharshi was a great mistake, one which has done and is doing a good deal of harm to the Brahmo Samaj. It had led to a neglect on the part of the Brahmos of our ancient scriptures and was thus discouraging scholarship and causing spiritual sterility. It had also created an unnecessary gulf between the old and the new society leading many Brahmos to call themselves non-Hindus and cease from taking a just pride in the glorious literary and spiritual achievements of the Hindu race."

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[2] Vide his *Renaissance of Hinduism*, p. 125.

[3] Vide his *Philosophy of Brahmaism*, p. 271.

Whatever may be the limitations of the Brahmo Samaj its contributions to the present renaissance of Hinduism cannot be too minimised. It has rendered, in the view of D. S. Sarma, useful service to Hinduism in three ways: " It popularised social reform, it prevented conversion to Christianity by creating a halfway house and it roused the orthodox Hindus to organise themselves and work for a revival of religion." Brahmoism was at best a protestant religion and the Brahmo Samaj a reform movement. In fact Brahmoism is to Hinduism what Protestantism is to Catholicism.

What the Brahmo Samaj did in the east of India, the Arya Samaj somewhat later did in the north, the Prarthana Samaj in the west, and the Theosophical Society in the south. All these movements came into being to readjust the old with the new in different parts of India. But as these later movements had not to do much with Bengal, we have confined our study to the Brahmo Samaj. The Brahmo Samaj, having scanty spiritual background, failed to fulfil the spiritual needs of sincere seekers of Truth. The advent of Sri Ramakrishna in 1836 was therefore a historical necessity.

Sri Ramakrishna is the starting point of a spiritual renaissance unprecedented in the history of Hinduism. Unlike his contemporaries he took his stand on the adamantine rock of realisation, and not on the quicksands of reason or learning. As if to expose the vanity of book-learning he remained almost an illiterate person. His life was a series of successful spiritual practices advocated by various schools of Hinduism. From image-worship to the meditation on the formless, attributeless Absolute he went through all forms of Hindu sadhanas and was blessed with realisations in a very short time. Thus in the brief span of fifty years he lived the whole spiritual life of the Hindu race. In the words of his French biographer, Romain Rolland, "Ramakrishna was the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people."

The Samaj movement of the nineteenth century represented and revived only this or that facet of the religious culture of India. But the movement that originated from Ramakrishna was representative of the entire gamut of Indian religion. "Of all religious movements that have sprung up in India in recent times", observes D. S. Sarma,[4] "there is none so faithful to our past and so full of possibilities for the future, so rooted in our national consciousness and yet so universal in its outlook, and therefore none so representative of the religious spirit of India as the movement connected with the name of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. In a way, the true starting point of the present Hindu Renaissance may be said to be Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. For his life represents the entire orbit of Hinduism and not simply a segment of it, such as Theism or Vedism."

A full-blown flower attracts bees from all quarters. When Sri Ramakrishna's illumination was complete, sincere seekers of truth flocked round him from all communities of young Bengal. Foremost among them was young Narendranath who, nurtured in English education and European thought had turned agnostic for the time being. He had approached some religious luminaries of his time but none could speak of God to him with the authority that comes of direct experience. At last he went to Sri Ramakrishna and asked him straight the question, "Have you seen God?". "Not only have I seen God but I can show Him to you: I see Him more intensely than I see you," came the spontaneous and unequivocal reply from the great seer. Astonished and awed beyond words by his revelations, Narendranath surrendered himself to this prophet of God. To quote the glowing words of Romain Rolland: "Thus at the feet of the simple Ramakrishna, the most intellectual, the most imperious, the most justly proud of all the great religious spirits of modern India humbled himself."

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[4] Vide his ***Renaissance of Hinduism***, p, 228.

This incident has more than a personal bearing; it has a national significance. The question which Narendranath put to Sri Ramakrishna was not merely an individual question. It was in fact a collective question – the question of young Bengal, nay of young India. Narendranath voiced the Anglicised mind of modern India, if not of the world. It was rather the question of the modern age whose characteristic features were materialism and agnosticism. Sri Ramakrishna, who alone of all his worthy contemporaries, truly represented ancient India, could accept the challenge of the age and give a suitable and satisfactory reply. None of his contemporaries spoke with such authority as he did. India has witnessed in every age the appearance of the great ones who make similar authoritative pronouncements. In the Upanishads we find a Vedic Rishi revealing his illumination thus: "Hear Ye Children of Immortality, Ye that reside on earth and in higher spheres, I have realised that Cosmic Being who is ever effulgent like the sun and is beyond all darkness. By knowing Him alone one can cross the ocean of worldliness and ignorance, and attain Immortality. There is no other way."

Sri Ramakrishna with his godly life and wonderful realisations stemmed the ebb-tide of Indian religion and turned it forward. New India which was about to adopt alien ideals was re-baptised in the last century by this messenger of God and initiated again in the age-old wisdom of her great past to evolve a still greater future. The light of Heaven that shone through his saintly life dispelled the darkness of the century and pointed out the way to young Bengal and young India, out of the cultural conflict in which they had been caught. For this reason all true aspirants of spiritual life rallied spontaneously round him. And the leaders and followers of young Bengal who were the most modernised of the century in India followed suit. We shall see in the next chapter how they were enlightened by the contact with Sri Ramakrishna and how the spell that had been cast on them was broken.

CHAPTER II

THE BRAHMO SAMAJ AND SRI RAMAKRISHNA

THE Brahmo Samaj was founded in 1828 at Calcutta by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the illustrious father of Modern India. A few years after this event the Raja passed away at Bristol in England in 1833. After Ram Mohan, Maharshi Devendranath Tagore became the leader of the Brahmo Samaj.

Like many other Bengali youths having a religious turn of mind Narendranath before he met Sri Ramakrishna joined the Brahmo Samaj and became one of its regular members. As his yearning for God-realisation increased he approached Maharshi Devendranath and asked him, " Sir, have you seen God ? " " I see in you many signs of a yogi," replied the Maharshi, " contemplate on God and you will see Him." But this indirect reply failed to satisfy the earnest inquirer.

Sri Ramakrishna knew Maharshi Devendranath through personal contact. While acknowledging Devendranath's greatness he commented: " Inspite of his being a great Jnani, he (Devendranath) had to reconcile himself to the world!" Though profoundly spiritual in disposition Devendranath was an aristocrat to the finger tips. And Sri Ramakrishna, the simple child of his Divine Mother that he was, did not at times know how to keep a piece of cloth around his waist. So their intimacy could not thrive.

Of the Brahmo leaders it was Brahmananda Keshab Chandra Sen who came into closest contact with Sri Ramakrishna. He was inspired by the Maharshi and joined the Brahmo Samaj in 1857 at the age of nineteen. From being a lieutenant to Devendranath he became the greatest figure in the Brahmo Samaj of his time.

Hearing of Keshab's piety the Master wished to meet him. Keshab was then staying with some of his followers in the garden house of Jaya Gopal Sen at Belgharia, a couple of miles from Dakshineswar. One afternoon the master went in the carriage of Captain Viswanath to Belgharia to see Keshab. On arrival Hriday, his nephew, went ahead and informed Keshab that his God-intoxicated uncle had come to see him. Keshab and his companions were delighted to hear of of a devotee of God. Sri Ramakrishna who was in plain dress sat with them and said, "I hear that you have seen God; so I have come to hear about Him". Then followed a conversation in the course of which the Master sang a song of the Divine Mother with the ecstatic fervour so natural to him and passed into the superconscious state. His face shone with heavenly lustre. Hriday chanted the sacred syllable '*Om*' in his ears and brought him back to normal consciousness. Keshab and party who had never witnessed the rare phenomenon before were amazed. They were greatly attracted to this man of God and listened to the inspiring words that fell from his lips. The Master spoke to them of the immeasurable revelations of God and illustrated them with some parables. The uplifting force of his words of wisdom convinced Keshab that Sri Ramakrishna had seen God. Keshab was awed and amazed by the extraordinary spirituality of this man of realisation and received unforseen light from his personality and utterances.

The contact with Sri Ramakrishna left an indelible impression on Keshab's mind; nay, it proved a turning point in his life. He visited the Master frequently and spent long hours in his holy company. Gradually they became very intimate. Sri Ramakrishna sometimes went to Keshab's house and even attended the festivals of his Samaj. On many occasions Keshab came with a group of Brahmos in a special steamer to enjoy the company of Sri Ramakrishna at the temple on the banks of the Ganges.

Keshab, with a view to share with others the wisdom he learned from Sri Ramakrishna, disseminated from 1875 onwards the teachings of the Master through sermons from the pulpit,. lectures from the platforms as well as through writings in the English and Bengali newspapers, such as *Sulabh Samachar*, *Sunday Mirror*, *Theistic Quarterly Review* etc. If Sri Ramakrishna happened to come to the Brahmo Samaj while he conducted the divine service he would stop the sermon, alight from the pulpit, greet him cordially and listen to his words of wisdom.

The Master pointed out to Keshab and other Brahmo preachers not to dwell much on the glories of God in their sermons, saying, " Does a son dwell on his father's wealth and possessions in his presence? Rather he enjoys thinking how his father loves him dearly! If you take note of His great powers then you can't think of Him as your nearest and dearest One, and realise His infinite love for us. In that case the feeling of His unapproachable nature and overpowering greatness will daunt us. If you wish to realise Him then think of Him as our own loving Mother" Keshab's religious views were substantially modified and broadened by the catholicity and force of the Master's teachings. He slowly regained his faith in the personal aspect of Godhead and image worship. The Master taught him, " As the wooden apple reminds one of the real apple so the images and symbols help one to grasp gradually, the formless aspect of God. As water frozen by cold into ice, becomes solid, so the formless God assumes forms by the intensity of devotion ". He and his followers went so far as to observe the Durga Puja and other Hindu festivals in their own way believing in the identity of God and His manifestation as taught by Sri Ramakrishna. Keshab's adoption of Hindu rites brought him perilously near justifying idolatry which was abhorrent to the Brahmo Samaj. He wrote at one time in the *Sunday Mirror* thus: "Hindu idolatry is not altogether to be rejected or overlooked as it represents millions of broken fragments of God. Collect them together and you get the indivisible Divinity. Their idolatry is nothing but the worship of the divine attributes materialised." Here Keshab speaks like a Hindu, for his mind was greatly hinduised by Sri Ramakrishna. He recognised the need of such rites and symbols as *Homa*, baptism, tonsure, or ochre cloth, and himself adopted some of them. The missionaries of his Samaj still wear an ochre-coloured wrapper as a mark of renunciation.

For nearly two years Keshab assimilated the universal teachings of Sri Ramakrishna as far as he could and then proclaimed his New Dispensation. The Master as a teacher never insisted on the Brahmo Samajists accepting his teachings in full. He was content with throwing light on the path of their spiritual life and left them to their natural growth. As Keshab could not accept the gospel of the Master in full in the interests of his Samaj so his New Dispensation became a sort of an eclectic religion. If we analyse it carefully we shall find that Keshab's faith consisted of only part of the New Gospel revealed by Sri Ramakrishna. He however expressed his spiritual indebtedness to the Master by reverently touching his feet at Dakshineswar and repeating before him, "Glory to the New Dispensation ".

Sri Ramakrishna held that Brahmoism, however narrow and one-sided it may be, was nevertheless a way of God-realisation, and never forgot to offer his salutations to the Brahmo Samaj at the time of saluting God and the religious sects after *Sankirtan.* This shows the genuineness of his love for the Brahmo Samaj and its leaders and followers. How Sri Ramakrishna loved Keshab and looked upon him as a spiritual comrade can be understood from the fact that upon hearing of his illness he prayed to the Divine Mother for his recovery. He went to Keshab's house during his last illness and seeing him emaciated by illness could not check his tears, saying, "As the gardener with a view to growing bigger roses prunes the plants and exposes their roots to the sun and dew, so the Lord has put your body to such tribulations for the enhancement of your spiritual unfoldment ". And again at the news of Keshab's death in January, 1884, Sri Ramakrishna remained speechless and bed-ridden for three days and said 'Hearing of Keshab's death I feel as though one of my limbs is lost'.

Sri Ramakrishna also used to visit the houses of Mahimacharan Mallik, Jaigopal Sen, Benimadhav Pal, Kasishwara Mitra and other Brahmos during the festivals and similar occasions.

Keshab's close associates, Pratap Chandra Majumdar, Girish Chandra Sen, Amritalal Bose, Trailokyanath Sannyal, etc., could not escape the irresistible influence of Sri Ramakrishna. An European observer named Charles H. Twaney, Director of Public Instruction, Bengal and Principal, Presidency College, Calcutta, noticed this and wrote: [1]" He also influenced Keshab Chandra Sen and Pratap Chandra Majumdar, the great leaders of the Brahmo Movement." Pratap, Keshab's chief lieutenant and successor, wrote an excellent article on Sri Ramakrishna in the *Sunday Mirror* of 16th April, 1876. This was reproduced afterwards in the *Theistic Quarterly Review*. In that article Pratap Chandra writes how, in spite of his English education and culture he was completely enchanted like many others by Sri Ramakrishna.

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[1] Vide his article, 'A Modern Hindu Saint' in the *Imperial Quarterly Review and Oriental & Colonial Record* for January, 1896.

Pratap Chandra in his life of Keshab Sen (pp. 357–359) frankly confesses the great influence by the Master on Keshab and his faith: "The acquaintance of this devotee (Sri Ramakrishna) which soon matured into intimate friendship had a powerful effect upon Keshab's mind. The very first thing observable in the Paramahamsa was the intense tenderness with which he cherished the conception of God as Mother......And now the sympathy, friendship and example of the Paramahamsa converted the Motherhood of God into a subject of special culture with Keshab. The greater part of the year 1879 witnessed this development. The motherhood of God became altogether a new feature of the revival which Keshab was especially bringing about. However much European taste might dislike such a development, Keshab's religion perceptibly gained in popularity with Hindu Society by this means".

Girish Chandra Sen, a missionary of Keshab's Brahmo Samaj, wrote a Bengali booklet[2] on Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings in which he candidly acknowledges Sri Ramakrishna's profound influence on Keshab's Brahmo Samaj: "It was from the example of the Paramahamsa's life that the idea of the Motherhood of God originated in the Brahmo Samaj. It was from him in particular that our Acharya Keshab Chandra got the idea of invoking God in the sweet name of Mother with the simplicity of a child and of praying to Him seeking His indulgence like a child. Previously the Brahmo Samaj was a religion of knowledge and dry disputation. Now the shadow of the

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[2] This booklet first appeared serially in their Bengali Organ named, '*Dharmatattwa*' of 1st *Aswin*, *Saka*. 1809, Pp.—1 .

Paramahamsa's life falling on it made the Brahmo religion more agreeable by removing its arid features".

Trailokyanath Sannyal in his Bengali life of Keshab Chandra (pp. 122–133) corroborates the above statements and remarks thus: "Through an exchange of the religious feelings of these two high-souled persons the Brahmo Samaj has advanced much in the path of devotion. The child-like nature at once simple and sweet of the Paramahamsa coloured Keshab's Yoga, his renunciation, his morality, his devotion and conception of religion. The charming play of devotion and the idea of God's Motherhood now displayed in the Brahmo Samaj are principally derived from Paramahamsa Ramakrishna. That the worship of God as Mother and adoration and prayers in those homely and common words in which Keshab was seen to indulge in his later days were due to the high-souled Paramahamsa is known to many." Trailokyanath was a sweet singer and a master composer of songs. Hearing his melodious singing Sri Ramakrishna passed into ecstasy many a time. Trailokyanath on the other hand was very greatly inspired at the sight of the ecstasy, the spiritual experiences and godliness of Sri Ramakrishna and wrote many songs full of the latter's ideas and inspiration. The Master's influence on the songs of the Brahmo Samaj in general was considerable and acknowledged by all.

The spontaneous and unequivocal statements of the Brahmo leaders mentioned above prove beyond doubt that Keshab and his colleagues heartily loved and respected Sri Ramakrishna and were profoundly influenced by his life and teachings. The Master by his universal love and unique catholicity endeared himself so much to all sections of the Brahmo Samaj that after the schism caused by the Cooch Behar marriage, the leaders and members of the Navavidhan as well as the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj kept on visiting him as before and drawing inspiration from him. Sri Ramakrishna's influence was also perceptible in the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj as long as Vijaya Krishna Goswami was its leader. But with the departure of Vijaya Krishna Goswami and a number of his religious-minded colleagues, his influence began to ebb. Pandit Shivanath

Sastri, who succeeded Vijaya Krishna, visited Sri Ramakrishna many times before this, greatly respecting him, and the Master too loved Sastri much. But seeing that Vijaya and his close friends had been transformed by their contact with him and left the Samaj he got afraid of the Master, and stopped his visits to Dakshineswar. A little before this Narendranath had joined the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj and endeared himself to Shivanath. But he contacted both Keshab and Sri Ramakrishna at the same time. One day he asked Shivanath, why he did not go to Dakshineswar any more. Shivanath outspokenly admitted : " If I go there frequently, my associates will do the same and that may very possibly lead to the dissolution of my Samaj ". Shivanath warned his associates and Narendranath too against going to the Master, saying, " His ecstasy is a kind of hysteria and epileptic fit due to nervous disorders. His unconsciousness is the same as that of a diseased brain ". These uncharitable remarks of Shivanath reached the ears of Sri Ramakrishna in course of time. One day when Shivanath visited the Master the latter said to him, " Well, Shivanath, I hear that you call my spiritual states as nervous diseases. Thinking day and night of brick, wood, earth, coins and other material and mortal objects you can keep yourself normal and I have become abnormal by meditating lifelong on Him whose consciousness has made the whole world conscious. What kind of intelligence is this that is yours ?".

Shivanath also did not relish the visits of Sri Ramakrishna to his Samaj. He feared that his followers might be drawn to the latter. One day Sri Ramakrishna went there in search of Narendranath during prayers. Entering the Samaj hall the Master fell into ecstasy and the audience was eager to see this state. In order to discourage this curiosity of the audience the lights of the hall were put out and Narendranath noticing the insult to the innocent saint brought him out. Shivanath wrote at the fag end of his life, in the pages of the *Modern Review* for 1919, his personal reminiscences of the Paramahamsa which were published that year as the fourth chapter of his book, '*Men I Have Seen*'. He writes that hearing from a friend the strange sayings and doings of Sri Ramakrishna he accompanied his friend to Dakshineswar to see the Master for the first time and was warmly received by him. He added that in the first meeting the saint said to him again and again in his well-known open hearted, simple, childlike manner, "I am so delighted to see you; will you come and see me now and then?" When repeated visits deepened their friendship, the Master gradually unbosomed his spiritual experiences to him. Shivanath's admiration for the Master is evident in his own words: "By extraordinary penances and austerities he had attained to a state of perfection the like of which was seldom seen."

"In fact the impression left in my mind, by intercourse with him" writes Shivanath, "was that I had seldom come across any other man in whom the hunger and thirst after spiritual life was so great and who had gone through so many privations and sufferings for the practice of religion. I was convinced that he was a *Siddha-Purusha* or one who had attained direct vision of Spiritual Truth".

Shivanath avers that he kept away from the Master during the last few years of his life. for two reasons: firstly, on account of the Master's association with objectionable characters such as actors of the Indian Theatres and secondly, on account of his being proclaimed an *Avatara* by his disciples. Shivanath's last interview with the Master took place during his last illness at Dakshineswar before his removal to Calcutta for treatment. The Brahmo leader concludes his interesting reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna with the remark that the Saint's memory is now feeding spiritually hundreds of earnest souls." "My acquaintance with him, though short", he declares, "was fruitful by strengthening many a spiritual thought in me. I owe him a debt of gratitude for the sincere affection he bore towards me. He was certainly one of the most remarkable personalities I have come across in life."

Shivanath survived Sri Ramakrishna by many years and lived to see how the potent message of the Master wrought a revolution in the religious world. However, he was so loyal to his Samaj that he could not accept Sri Ramakrishna's teachings even to the extent that the other Brahmo leaders did.

Of all the Brahmo leaders Vijaya Krishna was the only one whose religious views underwent a thorough change by the contact with Sri Ramakrishna. Born in an orthodox Vaishnava family, he wore the Vaishnavite signs on his person while a student of the Sanskrit college at Calcutta. He was a true seeker and staunch lover of truth. When he joined the Brahmo Samaj he no longer wore the Vaishnavite marks on his body. After the Cooch Behar marriage he forsook Keshab, whom he had respected as his Guru.

When Vijaya came in contact with Sri Ramakrishna and caught a glimpse of true Hinduism, he could not conceal his faith in the personal aspect of God any more. He gave up Brahmo Samaj and wore yellow robes like a Hindu Sadhu, even at the risk of losing the stipend he used to get from the Samaj. He openly acknowledged the spiritual light he had received from Sri Ramakrishna. When Sri Ramakrishna was lying ill with his throat trouble at Shyampukur near Calcutta he had a vision of the Master in flesh and blood at Dacca. Fearing that the vision might be an optical illusion he pressed the hands and feet of the figure of Ramakrishna and verified it for himself. Similar experiences convinced Vijaya that Sri Ramakrishna was a messenger of light and spirituality. He said of him, "I wandered in various holy places and mountains and met many saints and holy men, but not a single one like Sri Ramakrishna. Only a fragment of the spirituality that is manifest in him is found elsewhere. Being near Calcutta he has made himself easily accessible. That is why we cannot appreciate his extraordinary spirituality. Had he lived in a mountain cave or an out-of-the-way place where people could go with great difficulty we would have realised a little of his greatness". On one occasion he caught the feet of Sri Ramakrishna to his breast and said by implication that Ramakrishna was an incarnation of God.[3]

Sri Ramakrishna too loved Vijaya Krishna very dearly and spoke of his very high spiritual state as follows: "Vijaya is now knocking at the door of the room to enter which is to attain consummation". Vijaya advanced more and more spiritually after his contact with Sri Ramakrishna and was blessed with rare experiences. People were charmed with his dances and frequent ecstasies during *Sankirtan*. He retired at last to Puri, spent the remaining years of his life there and became well-known as a great Hindu Saint, passing away fourteen years after Sri Ramakrishna's death.

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[3] Vide *Sayings of Paramahamsa Ramakrishna* (Introduction pp.) translated and edited by Nagendranath Gupta and published from Karachi.

Vijaya's life shows that if all the Brahmo leaders had been as sincere in their spiritual search as he, they would have supplemented their narrow faith with the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and followed in his foot-steps. But they were held back by secular and personal interests and could not accept Sri Ramakrishna in full. It must however be acknowledged that it was the Brahmo Samaj that discovered to some extent the hidden treasure of Sri Ramakrishna's spirituality and drew the attention of the religious public of Calcutta to it. Narendra, Rakhal, Sarat, Sashi, Tarak, Hariprasanna and other young disciples who joined the Brahmo Samaj met the Master in or through this organisation. The Brahmo Samaj, therefore, was, as it were, the spring-board from which the young disciples and all other sincere seekers jumped to the feet of the Master. The young disciples therefore, as Sarat gratefully owns, are eternally indebted to the Brahmo Samaj; for this institution held before them and the religious minded youth of Bengal a religious ideal and helped them all to build their life and form character according to it.

In this chapter we have attempted to show how Sri Ramakrishna exerted a decisive influence on the Brahmo Samaj and how through that institution came in contact with his chosen disciples of whom Sashi, the subject of this biography was one. Sashi joined the Brahmo Samaj and met the Master through it. But as the Brahmo Samaj failed to satisfy his spiritual hunger he left it and became a disciple of the Master and a faithful apostle of his Gospel. The following chapters will narrate the circumstances in which Sashi met Sri Ramakrishna, sat at his feet, served him heart and soul, and dedicated his life to the practice and spread of his Gospel.

CHAPTER III

ANCESTRY AND EARLY LIFE

I

AT Jayanagar, Majilpore in the district of Twenty-four Parganas, Bengal, there was a Brahmin named Kaliprasad Bapuli who had three sons, Ramananda, Rajachandra and Thakurdas. For some reasons the family received from the then Maharaja of Burdwan a gift of land at Mayal Ichhapur in the Hooghly District, and settled there. After his wife's death, Ramananda Bapuli left the native village of Ichhapur, and moved to Janai. Ramananda's son was Girish Chandra, the father of Sarat Chandra, who later on became renowned as Swami Saradananda in the Ramakrishna Order. In 1862 Girish built a house of his own in Amherst Street, Calcutta, and began serving in a drug shop, known as the *Druggist's Hall*, in which in course of time he became a partner. At the earnest request of his well-wisher and business partner, Govinda Chandra Dutta, Girish with the permission of the pundits, changed his surname to Chakravarty.

Though Ramananda left his ancestral home his two younger brothers, Rajachandra and Thakurdas, continued to live there. We are here concerned only with Rajachandra, the father of Iswar Chandra. Iswar Chandra had four sons and four daughters. The eldest of them, Sashibhushan, became in later life known as Swami Ramakrishnananda. Before we turn to the early life of Sashibhushan it may be necessary to know something about the parents who were so fortunate as to have so great a son. The father was a great devotee of the Divine Mother. He was well versed in Tantric Scriptures and practices. As he found his village favourable to a religious life, he spent most of his days there. Auspicious nights were devoted mostly to japam and meditation on river banks, in cremation grounds or under sacred trees like *Bilva*, *Nimba*, *Vata* or *Aswattha*. His favourite place of meditation was a cremation ground dedicated to Lord Ghanteswara and situated at a short distance from his village. While at Calcutta he continued his spiritual practices in the burning ghat of Kaoratola near Kalighat.

It is said that once while returning from this old crematorium at midnight, he found a beautiful young girl loitering about a cross road from where the pilgrims take a turn to the temple. The road was dark and deserted. Out of curiosity Iswara Chandra asked the girl, "Who are you, mother, walking here alone at dead of night?" Turning a deaf ear to Iswara Chandra's query, the girl directed her steps quickly towards the temple. Like one spell-bound he followed her. The main gate of the temple was usually closed at that hour, but he found it to be partly open. As soon as he entered the *Natmandir* the unknown girl suddenly disappeared. This mysterious incident bewildered him. Pondering over it he sat down there and gave himself up to deep meditation, in which it was revealed that the Girl he had seen was none other than his *Ishtadevi*. His joy knew no bounds at this revelation.

Iswara Chandra was the *Sabha-pundit* of Raja Indranarayana Singh, belonging to the Zamindar family of Paikpara. Though his guru was Jagamohan Tarkalankar alias Swami Purnananda Avadhut, the famous Tantric scholar-saint of Bengal, yet the Raja respected Iswara Chandra also as his guru. He had at the back of his palatial residence a garden where *Homa-kunda*, *Yupa-kashtha*, *Panchamundi Asana* and other paraphernalia of Tantrik Sadhana, were kept ready for use by himself and Iswara Chandra. Besides these he had also provided the latter with all the things necessary for his sadhana. Iswara Chandra used to stay frequently also with his well-to-do devotee at Chowranghee, Calcutta. With the sanction of the Holy Mother he initiated Swami Saradananda and Yogin Ma in the mysteries of Tantrik worship and Tantrik Sannyas called *Purnābhisheka*. We learn from the personal diary of Swami Saradananda that this sacred ceremony took place on Tuesday, the 20th November, 1900.

It should be noted that both Iswara Chandra and Girish Chandra (Swami Saradananda's father) were the disciples of Swami Purnananda. Girish once took his guru to Sri Ramakrishna who was then lying ill in the Cossipore Garden. After exchanging a few words with the Master, Swami Purnananda readily realised that he was before a blazing fire. Iswara Chandra was the most distinguished and the dearest disciple of Swami Purnananda. Under his guidance on the 13th October, 1899, Swami Saradananda performed at the Belurmath the worship of the Goddess of *Mangala Chandi* and *Durga Saptasati Homa*. And in 1901 when regular worship of the goddess Durga, Jagaddhatri, Kali and Lakshmi was held for the first time at the Belurmath at the desire of Swami Vivekananda it was Iswar Chandra that acted as the *Tantradharaka*. Occasionally he passed a few days at Belurmath. While there he was sometimes found to tell his beads in sleep as a result of prolonged practice.

Iswara Chandra was in his native village in 1902 when his elder cousin, Girish Chandra, died at Benares at the age of over seventythree. Hardly a few months before, the death of his youngest daughter had overwhelmed him with grief, shattered his health, and made him bed-ridden with slow fever. As the news of Girish Chandra's death came in its wake he could not bear the shock of the added bereavement, and burst into tears like a boy. And in the early morning of the thirteenth day after his brother's death Iswara Chandra breathed his last, at the age of sixtysix. He was born on 18th May, 1837, and died on 26th November, 1902.

In appearance, Iswara Chandra was like a Rishi of old, with robust body, long hair, flowing beard and broad forehead besmeared with red sandal paste. His commanding personality and prolonged sadhana won respect from all who knew him.

Bhavasundari Devi, the wife of Iswara Chandra, was born in 1846 and passed away in Calcutta in 1925 at the age of about eighty years. She was a very frank and innocent woman. She was so shy and modest that even in the presence of her eldest son, Sashi, she would pull down the veil over her face. In the midst of the endless activities of her home she used to remain calm and detached. She was rather tall and slim, and maintained good health even in her advanced age. She was very fair in complexion. In her family shrine, Narayana, Manasa, Sitala, Simhavahini and other tutelary deites were daily worshipped. Besides these, every year, the worship of the Divine Mother Kali, was performed with pomp in her house. Once her second daughter and the youngest son fell ill, the former with dysentery and the latter with piles. She was so anxious to see her children cured that she dedicated her right hand to Mother Kali and ever after ate only with the left hand and not with the right. By this her children were miraculously cured.

Probably in 1910, when Swami Brahmananda was at 'Sashiniketan' in Puri, Swami Ramakrishnananda's mother went to Puri and stayed there for sometime. All were pleased with her candid behaviour and sweet words. Swami Brahmananda overwhelmed her with kind treatment and made good arrangements for her visiting the temples of the place. All this pleased her very much and she expressed great joy. During Swami Ramakrishnananda's last illness in Calcutta, his mother was in the city and came often to see him. One day when his mother arrived he said to her, "Mother dear, please place your benign hand on my head and bless me." When she lovingly caressed his head and back he sat like a child. At the time of his death she dreamt a wonderful dream. After her midday meal on the day of his death she was having a nap when she dreamt that some monks in ochre robes had come to her, seized her and dashed her on the ground. The painful dream broke her sleep and she became very anxious to get news of her ailing son. Presently the sad news of Ramakrishnananda's death was conveyed to her. She had the bad dream at the very hour when her saintly son passed away. But in giving this account of the Swami's parents we have anticipated the events of his whole life time.

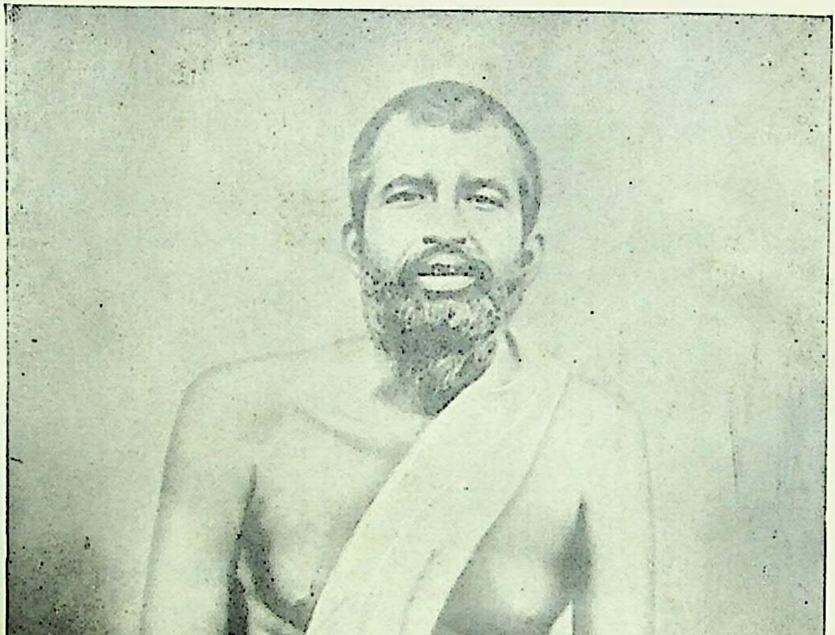
II

Of such pious parents Sashi was born in his ancestral home at Ichhapur in Hooghly in July, 1863, the very year in which Swami Vivekananda was born. His birthday fell on a Tuesday on the Krishna Trayodasi Tithi of Ashādha. Being the first child, Sashi was the darling of the home and a source of great joy to his parents. He was born and brought up in an atmosphere of orthodoxy. The religious training which he received from his saintly father in his childhood laid the foundations of the lofty spiritual character he developed in later life. The rigid orthodoxy that marked his religious life up to the last was stamped on his mind at home. The son had fully inherited his father's devotion and his mother's frankness. He worshipped the Divine Mother every year during the *Dassera* for twenty-four hours at a stretch—from six o'clock in the morning till six o'clock of the next morning—without moving from his seat at the feet of the Divine Mother during the whole period of worship. The seed that was sown in the life of the child by the father grew into a mighty tree under the fostering care of his guru. Rightly did Wordsworth say that the child is the father of the man. The boy was duly sent to school where he won a scholarship in the Entrance Examination from the Calcutta University. As a student he lived in the Calcutta home of his younger cousin, Sarat Chandra. He passed the F. A. examination from the Albert College, now defunct, and studied for the Bachelor's Degree at the Metropolitan College, now called the Vidyasagar College. But before the B. A. examination he gave up his studies to serve his guru during his last illness. He was a brilliant student of the college and his favourite subjects were Sanskrit and English literature, Mathematics, and Philosophy. His love for mathematics did not leave him even during his monastic life. Even long after he had become a monk, he would beguile a solitary hour over Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* or some hard problem in Trigonometry or Calculus.

In his college days he came in contact with Keshab Chandra Sen, the famous Brahmo leader and served for sometime as a private tutor of his sons. Like Narendranath and Rakhal and other brother disciples, he enrolled himself as a member of the Brahmo Samaj and joined its services and religious functions and attended the lectures of Keshab Sen. For a time he adopted some of the radical observances of the new Samaj, but he kept to caste and vegetarian food faithfully. In early life he had read a book on Sri Gouranga and had since then given up all animal food. Thus from his boyhood he became a strict vegetarian. If he found fish in the curry at home he would eat plain rice and go away. Advised by his guru, he observed the orthodox regulations of food till the end. But Keshab's contact could not give him that spiritual satisfaction for which his heart was hungering. He made this significant confession in later days that Keshab's preaching whetted his hunger but could never appease it. Sashi's close associate in youth, Sarat Chandra, testifies, "A strong thirst for the spiritual life was noticed in Sashi in his college days. Even as a boy he had picked up perhaps from his father the daily habit of ritual worship. Later on he studied the Bible, the *Chaitanya Charitamrita* and other sacred books and participated in the religious functions of the Brahmo Samaj. The spiritual thirst with which his young mind was parched, was finally quenched by Sri Ramakrishna at whose feet he learnt God-realisation as the *summum bonum* of life."

In the early days of the monastery at Baranagore, Sashi's father came and wanted to take his son back home. He begged and threatened but to no purpose. His son said, "The world and home are to me places infested with tigers!" He being the eldest son, his parents had hoped that after completing his education he would earn money and remove the family's financial difficulties. But Sashi had renounced the world for the realisation of God. The plight of his poor but pious parents gave his heart great anguish for sometime. Many a time he said to his friends with tears in his eyes, "I am at a loss as to my duty. Alas! I could not serve my parents; I could not be of any use to them. What great hopes they had placed in me! On account of our poverty my mother hardly had any jewellery. I cherished a desire to buy some ornament for her. But all those hopes cannot be fulfilled; it is impossible for me to return home. My Master had asked me to renounce 'woman and gold.' So I can never go back." After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, Sashi had been persuaded by his father to return home for a short time. The boy had accordingly spent some days at home; but immediately after the establishment of the new monastery he began to visit it frequently and after a few days, decided to remain there permanently. In April 1887, his father again came to the monastery with the object of persuading him to return home. On learning that his father had come Sashi fled from the monastery through the backdoor. He did not want to meet his father. On another day the father succeeded in meeting his son and tried to persuade him to go home. Failing in his purpose he began to malign his son's guru, Sri Ramakrishna. The son flared up in indignation and even threatened the father with dire consequences. The father appreciated his indignant son's devotion to the guru and desisted from further persuasion. He then paced the upper verandah with 'M.', and in course of his talk said in disappointment, " Who is in charge of this place? Narendra alone is at the root of all this mischief. For a while all these young men had returned home and devoted themselves to their studies." He further said to 'M.', ". You are doing the right thing. You are serving both the world and God. Can't one practise religion like you? That is exactly what I want Sashi to do. Let him live at home and come here too. You have no idea how much his mother weeps for him." He continued, " If you speak of searching for holy men, I know where to find a good one. Let Sashi go to him."

But the father lived to experience unbounded joy in the spiritual life of his son after some years. And Sashi greatly loved and respected his father as is evident from the following extract from his letter written to the latter from Madras possibly about 1898. " It is through your mighty blessings that my mind instead of going to the world has aspired to the feet of the Lord......It has been possible for a devout father like you to release me from the slavery of the world and appoint me to the service of God... I am extremely pained to learn that you are encumbered with debts; but my full faith is that the Divine Mother, Shyāmā, at whose feet you have dedicated your noble self will never keep you long in debts."



CHAPTER IV

AT THE FEET OF THE MASTER

THE event that had the most decisive and far-reaching effect on Sashi's life was his meeting with Sri Ramakrishna. It was when Sashi completed his twentieth year and was preparing for the examination in First Arts that he met the Master. The first meeting took place in October, 1883 at Dakshineswar when Sarat too was with him. There are two versions about this meeting. Brahmachari Prakash, Sarat's younger brother, who is still alive writes in his Bengali Life of Swami Saradananda (pages 15 and 16) thus: 'One day a classmate of Sashi Bhushan named Kali Prasad Chakravarty in the course of a talk said, "There is at Dakshineswar a Paramahamsa about whom Keshab Sen has written in glowing terms in the *Indian Mirror* (an English newspaper of Calcttta). Let us go to see him once". Both Sashi and Sarat decided to accompany Kali Prasad to Dakshineswar. Accordingly a convenient day was fixed and the three friends went to see the Paramahamsa. Sri Ramakrishna was pleased to meet Sashi and Sarat and to hear from them that they belonged to the same family and attended the meetings of the Brahmo Samaj of Keshab Sen. He said to them, "Very well, come again. But come alone; for religious matters should be discussed *in camera*." The effect of this instruction was that Sashi and Sarat afterwards visited the Master separately.'

Another version [1] runs as follows: "Sashi and Sarat who were members of a Brahmo organisation started under the influence of Keshab Chandra Sen learnt of Sri Ramakrishna from some fellow-members of the Association who had seen the Master at the Brahmo Samaj. With a view to enjoy the company of the saint, the members of the Association decided to have at the temple garden of Dakshineswar, their annual celebration which took place on a certain day in October,

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[1] Vide "*Life of Sri Ramakrishna*" (p. 472); Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta.

1883. Sashi and Sarat arrived at the garden duly to attend the function and along with some young friends went to see Sri Ramakrishna and found him seated in meditation on the small bedstead in his room. The Master opened his eyes and received them with a smile and had a mat spread for them on the floor. The Master enquired of their names and homes and was glad to hear that they belonged to the Brahmo Samaj of Keshab Sen. Then he said, " Bricks and tiles, if burnt when the trade-mark has been stamped on them, retain those marks for ever. Similarly, you should be stamped with spirituality before you enter the world. Then you will not become attached. But nowadays parents marry their boys too young. By the time they finish their education they become fathers of children and have to run hither and thither in search of a job to maintain the family. They find it difficult to secure an appointment with sufficient salary to feed so many mouths." One of the boys thereupon questioned him whether marriage was wrong and against the will of God. At this the Master pointed out a book on the shelf and asked him to read out from it an extract from the Bible which set forth the teachings of Christ and St. Paul on marriage. Therein the words of Christ were: ' For there are some eunuchs which were so born from their mother's womb; there are some eunuchs which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive let him receive.' The words of St. Paul were: "I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn." When the extract was read the Master observed that marriage was the root of all bondage. When one boy argued in favour of marriage the Master said with a smile, " Don't worry about that. Those who like to marry are at perfect liberty to do so. What I said just now is between ourselves. I say what I have got to say. You may take as much or as little as you can."

This clearly shows that the Master in the first meeting recognised Sashi and Sarat as his chosen ones and meant all this for them. The Master asked Sashi whether he believed in a formless God or in God with form. Sashi replied that as he was not certain of the very existence of God, he was unable to say one way or the other. This frank reply pleased the Master very much.

But Swami Ramakrishnananda himself gave Sister Devamata this account of his first meeting with the Master:[2] 'I had a desire to see the Paramahamsa at Dakshineswar; because Keshab Chandra Sen had spoken of him in such high terms. So one day I went with fifteen or twenty other boys. I was then reading for the First Arts (examination) and the others were preparing for the Matriculation. Being the eldest of the band, the conversation was addressed to me. I talked a great deal on that day; but never again.' These three versions are most probably three different descriptions of one and the same meeting.

The first interview with the Master left an indelible impression on the young mind of Sashi and led to a complete transformation of his life. Thenceforth he frequently visited Dakshineswar and sat at the feet of the Master. The life of the spirit as lived and taught by Sri Ramakrishna fascinated him for ever. He lost all attraction for his college studies and became gradually drawn towards the magnetic personality of the Master. He began to regard the Master's instructions as divine injunctions and tried his utmost to follow them literally. By this time he had become acquainted with Narendranath from whom he heard of the beauty of Sufi Poetry. Once at the Kali Temple, while he was learning Urdu in order to study the Sufi poets in the original, he was so absorbed in his study that the Master called him thrice before he heard the call. When he came, Sri Ramakrishna asked him what he had been doing and Sashi told him. Thereupon the Master observed quietly, "If you forget your duties for the sake of secular studies, you will lose all your devotion." Sashi understood the deeper significance of these words. It was clear to him that attention to mundane matters would stand in the way of the higher life which he was destined to live. He thereupon took his Persian books and threw them into the waters of the Ganges. From that day onwards books lost all importance to him. Sashi got the glimpse of a higher life in Sri Ramakrishna and made up his mind to dedicate himself to it. His admiration for the Master gradually grew into passionate love and reverence. He made the Master the pole-star of his life and the Master too accepted him as one of his chosen disciples. Sashi now began to devote more and more of his time to the service of the Master and the practice of spirituality under his loving guidance. He enjoyed the privilege of sitting at the feet of the Master for nearly three years from his first meeting in October, 1883 to Sri Ramakrishna's passing away in August, 1886. About his meetings with the Master he once said to a western devotee: "After I had listened to Sri Ramakrishna I had nothing more to say. I did not have to talk. Often I would go to him with my mind full of doubts which I wished him to clear away. But when I reached the temple I would find his room full of people and would feel very much disappointed. As soon as he saw me he would say, 'Come in; sit down. Are you doing well?' Then he would return to his subject but invariably he would take up the very doubt that was troubling my mind and would clear it away completely."

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[2] Vide "*Sri Ramakrishna and His Disciples*" (p. 95) By Sister Devamata.

The Master was very fond of taking ice during summer. On a sultry day Sashi went on foot from Calcutta to Dakshineswar, and took with him a lump of ice wrapped in paper and tied in a corner of his upper garment. It is strange that the ice did not melt, though it was carried a distance of about six miles from the northern part of Calcutta to Dakshineswar. Sashi reached Dakshineswar just at noon. The Master was glad, like a child, to have the small quantity of ice from him and said, "It is quite in keeping with your devotion." The sun was so hot on that day that it blistered Sashi's body. When the Master saw him he said, 'O! O!' as if he was himself pained! Sashi asked him what was the matter and he replied that as he looked at Sashi's body his own had begun to burn.

At the feet of the Master Sashi achieved a new birth, as it were, and entered into a new world. He also became acquainted with the other disciples of the Master. When Kali, who later became Swami Abhedananda, first went to Dakshineswar to meet the Master, he was very much disappointed to learn that the Master had gone to Calcutta and would return only after nightfall. Sorely perplexed he sat down under a tree, when he happened to meet Sashi, then unknown to him. Sashi asked him in loving accents the reason for his coming to Dakshineswar and Kali opened his heart to him. Coming to |know that Kali had not taken anything at noon, Sashi at once made arrangements for his lunch. Later a closer and an inseparable friendship grew up between Sashi, and Naren and Sarat. These three used to spend long days together at the temple in endless discussions. One night they walked back together from Dakshineswar; but on arriving at Calcutta they could not bear to part. So Naren went to the house of Sashi and Sarat who were then living under the same roof. Then Sashi and Sarat walked to Naren's house. Still their talk did not terminate, and Naren again came back with the other two. This went on till two in the morning. As it was then too late, none of them dared to return home. They therefore sat on Cornwallis Square and continued their discussion. As their discussion was going on, an old house collapsed in the neighbourhood, and the three friends ran to the spot to rescue the occupants. Afterwards in the excitement caused by this incident they returned home unnoticed.

For about two years Sashi continued his visits to Dakshineswar and enjoyed the holy company of the :Master there. But his happy days at Dakshineswar came to an end when the Master fell ill in the latter part of 1885. The Master was taken to Shyampukur in the beginning of September for treatment. But there his illness became aggravated. Thence he was finally brought in the second week of December of the same year to the garden-house at Cossipore.

Here about a dozen of young disciples including Sashi, leaving their homes and studies, banded themselves together to serve the Master. Sashi took the lead in doing personal service to the Master and came into prominence during this period even in the group of devoted disciples. With unswerving devotion he served the Master day and night setting aside considerations of health. While other disciples spent a good deal of their time in spiritual practices, Sashi always stood like a shadow by the side of the Master and attended to his needs. Service to the Guru was his main Sadhana and this transformed his life completely. The spirit of service to the Guru that he cultivated during this period became the dominant note of his life till the end. During this period of close contact it was revealed to Sashi that Sri Ramakrishna was a divine incarnation like Sri Krishna, Rama or Chaitanya. So he surrendered himself unreservedly to the Master. To love and serve the Master wholeheartedly became the consuming passion of his life. In the loving service of his Master, family and friends, study and other pursuits dropped off completely from his mind.

"Great as was the devotion of every one of the attendants to Sri Ramakrishna, that of Sashi was by far the most conspicuous. It was unparalleled. Sashi was the very embodiment of service. He was fully convinced that service to the Guru was the highest form of religion. He practised no other spiritual discipline. He knew no other asceticism. Regardless of personal comfort, of food or rest, he was indefatigably at work. His one idea was to alleviate the sufferings of the Master. He would have given up his life if he had thought that would cure him. He had attained perfection through service: so of what use were other forms of discipline to him? Every one marvelled at his indefatigable energy, his sustained power of endurance and his boundless love for the Master."[3]

The following incident that took place on April 5, 1886, shows how Sashi took scrupulous care that the Master was not troubled at all by anybody in his failing health. A crazy woman had been teasing everybody to see the Master. She had assumed towards him the attitude of a lover, like that of a *gopi* and frequented the garden house and had stolen into the Master's room. She could not be stopped from coming even by blows. Sashi said, "If she comes again I shall shove her out of the garden." To this the Master tenderly replied, "No, No! Let her come and go away." Rakhal also remonstrated with Sashi, who thereupon said, "I don't mean that. But she troubles the

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[3] Vide *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (p. 587–88), Calcutta.

Master. And she is such a nuisance." The Master was then seated completely naked and looked like a five-year old boy. Just at that time the insane woman went upstairs and stood near the door of the Master's room. At the bidding of the Master, Sashi now led her away downstairs at once.

How dearly the Master loved Sashi can be clearly understood from the following incident. One winter at midnight in the Cossipore garden-house, Sashi, hardly covering himself, left the Master's room to cleanse the commode. On his return he was mortified to see the Master crawling on a stick and struggling to get at a wrapper from the clothes-horse. At this painful sight he thought within himself: "Alas! I forgot in a hurry to cover him sufficiently; so on account of the cold perhaps he is trying to get a wrapper." Then he said to the Master: "Why you did not ask me, Sir, for a wrapper?" To this the Master feelingly replied: "I am feeling the cold, as you went out almost barebodied in such a cold night, and so I was getting a wrapper for you."

Two more incidents of this period may be referred to here. On the day of Car festival of Lord Jagannath, the Master asked Sashi to go out and see the festival. Sashi at first declined to go leaving the Master alone on the sick bed. But the Master prevailed upon him to do so. Sashi went reluctantly and saw the festival and the fair held in that connection at a place not very far from the garden. At the fair Sashi purchased a small knife worth only two pice for cutting lemons for the Master. On his return the Master was delighted to see the knife and said, "You should not fail to visit such festivals and make some purchase however small. Poor people prepare so many things on these special occasions and bring them to the fair for sale with the hope of earning something. Try to keep up the ancient traditions as far as practicable and encourage others to do so."

In the evening of April 22, 1886 Sashi was strolling in the garden with Rakhal and 'M' and talking about the Master. 'M' said, "The Master is like the child beyond the three gunas." Rakhal and Sashi together, approved of the epithet saying that the Master himself described his nature in that way. Sashi said, "He described the different kinds of intelligence to Charu. The right intelligence is that through which one attains God. But the intelligence that enables one to become a Deputy Magistrate or a lawyer, or to acquire a house is a mean intelligence. It is like thin and watery curds which merely soaks flattened rice but do not add any flavour to it. But the intelligence by which God is realised is like the thick superior curds which are full of flavour."

Sri Ramakrishna stayed at the Cossipore garden for about eight months. The Master's last illness brought his disciples into closer contact and was instrumental in knitting them into a brotherhood. Here the Master distributed ochre cloth among his young disciples and initiated them into the monastic life, thus founding the Ramakrishna Order. Here Sashi too like other disciples embraced the life of a monk at the feet of the Master. The young disciples did their best for their ailing Master, but nothing was of any avail. The illness proved fatal and the Master entered Mahasamadhi in the early hours of Monday, 16th August, 1886. Sashi who was attending on the Master at the time of his passing away has significantly observed that he never saw the Master more happy, well and cheerful than on the day of his final departure. Sri Ramakrishna then appeared like an innocent child smiling and waiting to jump into the arms of the Divine Mother.

The moving story of the Master's last hours as told by Sashi to an American devotee[1] runs as follows:

"We all thought the Master was better; because he ate so much more supper than usual, and he said nothing of going. In the afternoon he had asked Yogin to look in the almanac and see whether it was an auspicious day. Also he had been telling us for some time that the vessel which was floating in the ocean was already two-thirds full of water. Soon the rest would fill up and it would plunge into the ocean. But we did not believe that he was really going. He never seemed to mind the pain. He never lost his cheerfulness. He used to say that he was all well and happy, only there was a little something here, pointing to the throat. 'Within me are two persons,' he would declare, 'One is the Divine Mother, the other is her devotee. It is the devotee that has been taken ill.'

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[1] Vide "Sri Ramakrishna and his Disciples" (p. 161-63) By Sister Devamata.

" When Sri Ramakrishna gave up his body I think it was the most blissful moment of his life. A thrill of joy ran through him. I myself saw it. I remember every incident of that last day. Our Master seemed very well and cheerful. In the afternoon he talked for fully two hours to a gentleman who had come to put him some questions about Yoga. A little later I ran some seven miles to bring the doctor. When I reached the doctor's house, he was not there, but I was told that he was at a certain place ; so I ran another mile and met him on the way. He had an engagement and said he could not come, but I dragged him away just the same.

" On that last night Sri Ramakrishna was talking with us to the very last. For supper he had drunk a whole half glass of *Payasam* and seemed to relish it. There was, no doubt a little heat in the body ; so he asked us to fan him and some ten of us were all fanning him at once. He was sitting up against five or six pillows which were supported by my body and at the same time I too was fanning him. This made a slight movement. Twice he asked me : " Why are you shaking ?" It was as if his mind was so fixed and steady that he could perceive the least motion. Narendra lifted up his feet into his hands and began to rub them and Sri Ramakrishna was talking to him, telling him what he must do. " Take care of these boys," he repeated again and again, as if he was putting them in Naren's charge. Then he wanted to lie down.

" Suddenly at one o'clock he fell towards one side ; there was a low sound in the throat and I saw all the hairs of his body stand on end. Narendra quickly laid his feet on a quilt and ran downstairs as he could not bear it. A doctor, who was a great devotee and who was feeling his pulse, saw that it had stopped and began to weep aloud. 'What are you doing?' I asked, impatient with him for acting as if the Master had really left us.

"We all believed that it was only Samadhi. So Naren came back and we sat down, some twenty of us and began repeating all together: 'Hari Om! 'Hari Om!' In this way we waited until between one and two the next day. Still the body had some heat in it, especially about the back, but the Doctor insisted that the soul had left it. About five the body had grown cold, so we placed it on a cot, covered it with garlands and carried it to the burning ghat."

All the disciples present on the occasion were dumb with grief at the departure of their beloved Master. The mental agony of Sashi could be better imagined than described. The passing away of one whom he loved and served for about three years as his chosen ideal upset him for the time being. He fell at the feet of the Master motionless. Unbearable grief paralysed his body and mind and he became unconscious. After a time he came back to consciousness in a flood of tears. But when the body of the Master was in flames at the burning ground of Cossipore, Sashi sang the sweet name of his Master in triumphant praise. When the cremation was over, he gathered the relics that remained and carried them in a pitcher on his head to the Cossipore garden[5].

Ramachandra Dutt, a prominent lay disciple of the Master gives us the following impassioned eulogy[6] of Sashi's singular devotion and service to the Master. "Sashi's service is incomparable and inimitable. If selfless service in the proper sense be there in the world, Sashi knew it fully well. If there be any untiring attendant worth the name, Sashi should be termed the foremost of them all. If any one wants to see the motiveless love, then Sashi is his model. Sashi had only merits, no faults. But there is a proverb that none can be absolutely free from faults. Sashi served the Paramahamsa Deva heart and soul without any question, without any murmur and without any consideration of personal inconvenience. If this may at all be called a fault, then Sashi had this in full. We have only heard of Hanuman's matchless devotion as a servant to his Lord; Sashi showed the perfection of such devotion before our very eyes. No devotee of Paramahamsa can surpass Sashi in this respect. My statement is not at all exaggerated. All those who approached Paramahamsa Deva had some ulterior motive or other. They had asked 'How shall I be saved ?, 'How shall I progress in spiritual life ?, or How shall I walk on the path of Yoga ?' But Sashi had no such motive whatsoever. He surrendered his humble self completely to the Master and learnt only the religion of selfless service from him. Practice of that religion in full has made him blessed beyond compare. There is no doubt that whosoever will hear the thrilling story of Sashi's loving service to the Master will attain devotion to the Master. Brother Sashi, you are blessed. You mastered the secret of real service. To the full satisfaction of your heart you have done service to the Guru which is the most meritorius act in religious life. Brother dear, born as a man, you understood the duty of human life. That is why you are the object of the Master's special grace. By his grace you stand at the head of the circle of his attendants. You are his chosen son and servant and is second to none in service to him.'

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[5] A large horizontal tablet on a high rectangular base now marks the spot beside the Ganges where Sri Ramakrishna's body was cremated. The sacred memory of the Master's living presence still pervades the crematorium and the garden of Cossipore as well as the temple of Dakshineswar. It is worthy of note that the garden house at Cossipore where the Master spent the last eight months of his earthly sojourn and breathed his last in 1886 and where the Master initiated his young disciples into monastic life and thus laid the foundation of the Ramakrishna order with his own hands has been acquired at last in 1946 by the trustees of the Belur Monastery for proper use and preservation.

[6] See his Bengali life of Sri Ramakrishna (p. 186-187)

"M" too remarks that during Sri Ramakrishna's last illness Sashi nursed the Master with unswerving zeal. Thus Sashi was to Sri Ramakrishna what Hanuman was to Sri Ramachandra.

CHAPTER V.

VIGIL OVER THE MASTER'S RELICS

THE Sacred relics of the Master were collected in a vessel at the crematorium and carried to the garden-house where they were kept for sometime in the room wherein the Master had resided during his last illness. In the meantime the devotees and disciples discussed the very important matter as to how and where the relics should be properly preserved. The majority were in favour of purchasing a plot of land on the banks of the Ganges and interring the relics there. For want of funds, the project had to be abandoned. The house-holder devotees decided to preserve the ashes in a garden (Yogodyan) owned by Ramachandra Dutt at Kankurgachi, near Calcutta, where the Master had once been. The young disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, however, did not approve of this idea. So the major portion of the bones and ashes were taken to the house of Balaram Bose for regular worship, with the aspiration of burying it at the earliest opportunity somewhere on the bank of the Ganges. The rest of the ashes was then carried by Sashi on his head to the Yogodyan on the Janmashtami day (circ. 22-nd October, 1886) for interment. A deep pit was dug and the pitcher was placed within it. When earth was shovelled over the pitcher into the pit and beaten down with an iron rammer Sashi felt heart-rending pain, wept profusely and fainted. He regained his consciousness long after the burial was over.

Tarak, Latu and Gopal (senior) who had already renounced the worldly life during the lifetime of the Master continued to live at the garden-house of Cossipore till the expiration of the lease. In a month the lease expired and reluctantly they had to quit the house hallowed by the holy association of the Master. To them, Surendranath Mitra, a favourite lay disciple said, " Dear brothers, where will you go? Let us hire a house where you will live together and where we householders shall find a temporary refuge from our worldly cares. I used to contribute a trifle towards the expense of the Cossipore garden. I shall gladly continue that bit of help and you can at least have a roof over your head and lead a simple life." Accordingly at Baranagore, situated almost half way between Calcutta and Dakshineswar, an old dilapidated house was rented and the first monastery of the Ramakrishna Order was formally started. Here in the beginning the three disciples mentioned above lived and after some time they were joined by others who had returned home temporarily on account of the persistent appeals of their parents. The building which housed the Baranagore Math, a two-storeyed one, was the abandoned residence of the aristocratic Munshi family of Taki, and stood behind the temple precincts on the Paramanik Ghat Road near the Ganges. It is now in ruins. Being infested by snakes and haunted by ghosts it was available for the low rent of ten rupees a month. The ground floor was dark and damp and unfit for habitation; hence its rooms were used as kitchens, store etc. Sashi was once bitten by a snake in one of those dark rooms. The shrine was located in a room in the upper storey. There was also a hall which they styled '*the room of the demons*'. Here mats were spread and visitors were received. They rightly called themselves 'demons'; for like the demons of Lord Shiva they had given up the sense of shame, fear and hatred, defied the challenge of the world and devoted themselves absolutely to the realisation of God. After study and meditation they used to assemble in the hall for rest, chat or religious discussion, and devotional music.

Towards the end of December, 1886, the young disciples led by Narendra left the Math and went to the village home of Baburam at Antpur on invitation from the latter's mother, who was a great devotee of the Master. There on Christmas eve, Narendra with the other disciples sat before a bonfire and meditated long and took the vow of eternal sannyas to dedicate their lives to the practice and preaching of the Master's message. Thus it was that the idea of organising themselves into a monastic order took a definite shape in the minds of the young visionaries. Fired with a new vision and enthusiasm they returned to the monastery at Baranagore and began to live the life of renunciation and meditation in right earnest.

It was in the Baranagore Math that Sashi along with the other disciples formally embraced the monastic life and assumed new names with appropriate rites as ordained by the Sankarite Order of Hindu Monks. Sashi received the monastic name of Ramakrishnananda with the hearty approval of all brothers. Narendranath wanted to have that name for himself, but as Sashi deserved this significant designation more than anybody else, it was given to him. "Swami Ramakrishnananda", observes Swami Nirvedananda,[1] "kept the memory of the Master ablaze in the monastery by his supreme dedication to the service of the Master. He preserved the relics of the Master in a separate room, placed a portrait of his on a pedestal and served it with the entire devotion of his heart, just as he had done when the Master was in flesh and blood. His scrupulous precision and regularity of service made everybody feel the living presence of the Master in the monastery." Swami Ramakrishnananda from the very beginning arranged the shrine and conducted it in the orthodox way. In the morning he would pluck flowers, sweep the shrine, wash the utensils and make necessary preparations for worship. At noon he would bathe in the Ganges, bring sacred water from there, perform worship with single-minded devotion, cook rice and offer it to the Master. In the evening he would perform *Aratrika*, kindle light in the shrine and burn incense and wave lights before the pictures hanging on the walls of the monastery. Oleographic pictures of Christ, St. Paul, Kali the Mother and many other gods and goddesses adorned the walls of the hall. Some of these old pictures of the Baranagore Math are still to be found in the Belur Math. After *aratrika* Swami Ramakrishnananda would prostrate before the likeness of the Master uttering, "Victory to the great Guru!", "Victory to the great Guru!". At the time of *aratrika* he used to sing the following hymn to Viswanath chanted at Benares during evening service:

"*Jai Shiva Omkara*
Bhaja Shiva Omkara".
"Victory to Shiva, the symbol of Omkara!
Homage to Shiva, the embodiment of Omkara!"

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[1] Vide his ***Sri Ramakrishna and Spiritual Renaissance.*** P. 203.

Swami Virajananda, who was an inmate of the Baranagore Math, writes: " Oh, how wonderful was the *arati* of Sashi Maharaj! It was really a sight for the gods. Enveloped within the smoke of burning incense and drowned in the music of drums and cymbals, he would wave *Chowrie* towards the end of the *arati*. Intoxicated with god-consciousness he would repeat, " *Jai Gurudev* ! ", " *Jai Gurudev* ! ", in a crescendo of divine abandon and would dance from one side of the hall to the other rhythmically pacing the floor. What unique feeling of ecstatic love would course through the hearts of men witnessing it can better be imagined than described. The whole building would be in a tremor.. With a heavenly glow on his face he looked the very embodiment of the god of fire. The hand of the drummer would get benumbed and would refuse to move. The spectators would watch from the adjoining room and join him, all repeating in chorus, " *Jai Gurudev* ! ". "*Jai Gurudev* ! ". They too would dance in rapture and fervour. Then all would prostrate themselves before the deity and recite in chorus verses from *Guru Gita* :

" Blinded by the darkness of the world I was.
He who had opened my eyes
With a stick of collyrium of Knowledge;
To Him I bow down, my Guru, the Adorable."

Next the last portion of the hymn composed by Swami Abhedananda would be chanted;

" With our head bent low in reverence,
To Him, the taintless, the eternal and of universal form,
But who, out of compassion takes a human form :
To that worshipful highest Divinity,
Sri Ramakrishna, Incarnation of God,
Let our salutations be."

Finally with the words, "*Jai Sri Guru Maharaj ki Jai!*" the evening service would terminate.

The monetary help that came to the monastery from Suresh Mitra and a few other devotees was not enough for its maintenance. What was left over after paying the house rent and the cook's salary was quite insufficient to feed so many mouths. Therefore pecuniary difficulties of the severest type confronted them. The young monks had to subsist on the most meagre food and clothing and sleep at midnight under a single big curtain for want of separate bedding. During this trying period Swami Ramakrishnananda served as a teacher in the Baranagore High School for two hours daily. He continued this for about three months for the maintenance of the monastery. The young monks went out daily by turns for alms and became the target of the taunts and pity of the local people. Whatever was received by begging would not even suffice for the day. There were days when they had to take rice only with a pinch of salt. The days when they got a curry would be in the nature of a festival. This condition continued throughout the Baranagore Math days.

One day four of the monks went out for alms, but unfortunately got nothing That day the store too was empty. The thought that there was nothing to be offered to the Lord, made Sashi Maharaj anxious. That the Master would have to fast that day saddened him and made him restless. Seeing the brother monks intoxicated in devotional singing and praying he secretly called aside a friendly neighbour and said to him, ' Brother dear, today nothing has been obtained by begging. Can you give me a few handfuls of rice, some potatoes and a little ghee ?' Though the other members of his family had no sympathy for the young monks of the monastery this friend privately gave Sashi Maharaj a quarter seer of rice, some potatoes and a little ghee. Sashi Maharaj gladly cooked these and offered them to the Master. After the offering was over he mixed them together and made little balls of them. He took the balls to the hall where the brothers were still absorbed in *sankirtan* and put a ball in the mouth of each one of them. The food, though small in quantity, was very palatable to the hungry brothers who were immensely pleased and said with surprised looks, 'Brother Sashi, where did you procure such sweet balls?'[2]

In this way Swami Ramakrishnananda kept constant watch over the Master's relics like a guardian angel and served his brother monks like a loving mother. "He was the main pillar of the Math." said Swami Vivekananda, referring to him. "Without him life in the monastery would have been impossible. Often the monks would be lost in prayer and meditation, with no thought of food, and Ramakrishnananda would wait with their meals or even drag them out of their meditation."

Swami Ramakrishnananda had no desire for pilgrimages. He fully believed that the Master was present in the shrine in his subtle body. Hence he felt the presence of all holy places in the shrine. He served the Master's relics as he had served him when he was living. His pilgrimage and penance consisted in ceaseless vigil over the sacred remains of the Master. Constant repetition of the Name and continuous remembrance became natural to him. The service in the shrine soon became second nature with him. And he wanted to continue it all his life, saying, "I shall spend my whole life in this work alone. I don't want anything else." Lest this vigil should be broken he never went even to Calcutta which was but a few miles away. When Suresh Mitra, a favourite disciple of the Master and the chief supporter of the monastery was on his death-bed, the other monks went to see him. But Swami Ramakrishnananda was reluctant to quit his post. Suresh Babu was however, very anxious to see this beloved attendant of the Master. So Swami Ramakrishnananda had to yield to the lay brother's affectionate insistence and went in a carriage hired for the return journey, spent about an hour by the side of the dying devotee and then came back to the monastery.

Christmas Eve was always celebrated at the Baranagore Math. Knowing that Swami Ramakrishnananda and the other young monks were ardent devotees of Christ some Bengali Christians of the Salvation Army took a fancy for them. They visited the monastery several times and talked with the monks on Christ with the ulterior motive of converting them. One day they audaciously made a proposal of conversion to Swami Ramakrishnananda and others saying that none but Christ could grant salvation. Swami Ramakrishnananda who was well read in the Bible argued with them vehemently and proved the fallacy of their dogmatic statement. The Christian missionaries were at their wit's end when they were encountered by the profound knowledge of Christ's teachings which the young Hindu monks exhibited in their debate. Since they were veteran proselytisers they went to the length of holding out to them the temptation that if they became Christians they would be provided with European wives! At this tomfoolery Swami Ramakrishnananda flew into a rage, scolded them severely and showed them the door. After this they were never again seen at the Baranagore Math.

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[2] Vide the Bengali life of Swami Brahmananda published from the Udbodhan office, Calcutta, pp. 116-117.

Some monastic disciples of Swami Vivekananda, such as Swamis Virajananda, Suddhananda, Vimalananda and Bodhananda subsequently met Swami Ramakrishnananda at the Baranagore Math and derived abundant inspiration from him. Swami Virajananda, the present President of the Ramakrishna Order, joined the Baranagore Math mainly through the instrumentality of Swami Ramakrishnananda. He was then a student at college and first met the latter at the Baranagore Math in the earlier part of 1891 with some of his friends. Swami Ramakrishnananda received them cordially, made eager enquiries of their studies and tested them to see whether their coming to the monastery to become sadhus had its root in an evasion of their studies. If they failed to answer his questions satisfactorily or solved incorrectly the mathematical problems put by him he would rebuke and advise them not to neglect their studies. Hence the young visitors were very much afraid of him. Kalikrishna (Swami Virajananda) was weak in mathematics and was not sure of his success in the subject in F. A. examination. Coming to know of this Swami Ramakrishnananda remarked, " The summer vacation is drawing near. Why don't you spend the vacation in the monastery? I shall teach you mathematics so well that you will be able to pass the examination easily." Accordingly Kalikrishna, with the permission of his father, came to the monastery with his books at the commencement of the vacation. Swami Ramakrishnananda was immensely delighted at his arrival. Young Kalikrishna took great interest in doing the work of the monastery and did not think of his studies at all. Swami Ramakrishnananda too totally forgot his promise to coach him with the result that Kalikrishna never touched his books there throughout the vacation. After sometime Kalikrishna renounced the world and joined the order at the Baranagore Math. Swami Bodhananda, the founder-president of the Vedanta Society, New York, used to visit the monastery at Baranagore as a student in 1890. He speaks of Swami Ramakrishnananda as follows in his reminiscences.[3] "Swami Ramakrishnananda had never for once left the service of the Master and stuck to the spot, even when all his comrades had gone on pilgrimage to different parts of India. He was very vigilant about his daily worship. We were four—Virajananda, Vimalananda, Atmananda and myself. Swami Ramakrishnananda asked us not to neglect our studies. He quoted to us a saying of Sri Ramakrishna and explained its meaning. He examined us in our subjects. He gave us *prasad*. He also gave us some *nirmalya*. When we were ushered into the shrine, we felt the atmosphere simply transporting—so holy. The shrine room was a very small one. The picture of Sri Guru Maharaj was on the bed. In front of his bed-stead was his *paduka* (sandals) and the *kauta* (casket) containing his ashes. We saluted them. Swami Ramakrishnananda prayed to Sri Guru Maharaj to bless us, so that our bonds might be cut off. From that day we began to visit the Math frequently.

"As we began to visit the Math, Swami Ramakrishnananda allowed us some privileges. When the day was too hot, he would ask us to take the fan and fan Sri Guru Maharaj. What a wonderful spectacle it was to see Swami Ramakrishnananda serving the Master!

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[3] Vide Vedanta Kesari, July 1924.

Day and night the Swami had no other thought but that of the Master. If he felt hot, he would get up and fan Sri Guru Maharaj. In fact, to him the Master was a living personality, who could be seen, felt and served. His services were very simple. He would get up at 4 A.M., after washing and change of clothes he would enter the shrine, raise up the curtain from the bed-stead and rouse the Master from his sleep. He would then offer water for washing. Then the *Bhoga* consisting of a few coconut *laddus* (balls) would be offered; next tobacco for smoking was offered. He would then sweep the room. He never allowed even his brother disciples to help him. Next he would collect flowers for worship, and then go to the bazaar for buying vegetables. He would select the best the market could offer. He himself would dress the vegetables for cooking. Then he would go for his bath in the Ganges. When he returned to the Math, he would carry with him a pitcher of the holy water for puja. He would sit for worship; it was very simple—a few flowers devotionally offered. After the puja, *Bhoga* would be given. After the *Bhoga* the *prasadam* would be distributed. Now and then he would give us the privilege of preparing *chandanam*. We enjoyed these so much."

After some time Swami Bodhananda joined the Baranagore Math like Swami Suddhananda and others. Thus was the Monastery conducted at Baranagore for about six years till 1892, when it was shifted to Alambazar.

II

The monastery which was transferred in 1892 from Baranagore to Alambazar, situated immediately to the south of Dakshineswar, was conducted there till 1897. It was housed in a rented two-storeyed building belonging to the well-to-do Chatterjee family of the locality. The house was quite large, consisting of a number of rooms and pillared verandahs on the first and second floors. There was a lawn and a pond in the compound of the building which lay in the lane leading from Alambazar to Lochan Ghosh's Bathing Ghat on the Ganges.

During the occupation of the two previous tenants a few suicides had occurred in the house and had given rise to the rumour that the house was haunted. Hence the owner had to let the house for the low rent of ten rupees a month. Even after the establishment of the monastery, the neighbours were afraid of going there after dark.

As at Baranagore so at Alambazar Swami Ramakrishnananda kept vigil over the sacred relics of the Master. A photograph of Sri Ramakrishna was installed on a wooden stand and regularly worshipped as before. A devotee, who is still living and who has had the privilege of being present at the worship and the evening service of Swami Ramakrishnananda in the Alambazar Math, even after fifty years, remembers how the Swami's face glowed with the inspiration of faith and sincerity, and writes; "His methods of worship were wonderful and charming. One witnessing it spontaneously felt that the worshipper sensed the presence of a living person. During *Aratrikam* when he used to wave the light on high repeating in a solemn voice. "*Jai Guru!*," "*Jai Guru!*" everybody who attended the service was filled with reverence and awe. G. C. Ghosh once remarked to the brother-monks, "Sashi is *āsana-siddha*[4]; otherwise it is impossible for anyone to worship the whole night at one sitting!"

Every morning the Swami went out to collect flowers for worship from gardens lying in the neighbourhood. Sometimes during rainy months he walked up to the Kali temple at Dakshineswar for this purpose. One day while he was plucking flowers there, a Kashmiri sannyasin, who was a staunch Advaitin, met him, and knowing that he performed daily worship argued with him as to the propriety of a sannyasin doing so .instead of practising Vedantic Sadhanas. Swami Ramakrishnananda easily convinced him of the compatibility of ritual worship with Vedantic practices in the monastic life, and took him to the monastery and kept him there for some days. The Swami had the gift of winning even his opponents easily by his genial manners and sweet talk.

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[4] Adept in the meditative pose.

The pecuniary straits that had confronted the Math throughout at Baranagore continued in Alambazar also for the first year. Then the financial conditions slightly improved and more people began to visit the Math and contribute to it. Swami Vivekananda after his historic triumph at Chicago had just then attained wide celebrity. So the educated people sought out his brother-monks and flocked to them. Gradually public opposition and indifference gave way to appreciation and co-operation. The disciples of the Master now congregated at the monastery and the festivals were celebrated on a grand scale. Swami Ramakrishnananda fed the devotees with loving care on festival days and distributed the surplus sweets among them to be taken home. He did not like to keep by anything of the festival eatables for the next day. His amiable nature and kind treatment soon turned the new-comers into devotees and their number swelled from day to day.

In 1894 the usual anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated at the Dakshineswar temple on a large scale. Ramachandra Dutta and other lay devotees had made splendid preparations for it. Swami Ramakrishnananda too was present for the festival and danced with ecstatic fervour uttering the name of the Master. The devotees and visitors present were highly inspired by witnessing his ecstatic dance and bowed down to him in reverence. When the Swami saw his lay brother-disciples, he embraced each of them with overflowing joy and love.

The monks used to disappear now and then from the Math and lead wandering lives. But Swami Ramakrishnananda stayed on at the monastery and did not visit even Calcutta except for special reasons and that very rarely. Once he went away without informing anybody. This unusual action created great anxiety in the minds of the brother monks. With deep concern they searched for him and fortunately found him the following day at Dakshineswar and persuaded him to return to the monastery. The Swami is said not to have gone even as far as Benares in the north on pilgrimage. Such was the singularity of his devotion to and the steadfastness of his vigil over his Master's relics. One summer night when Swami Ramakrishnananda was lying in the room in the south west corner in the upper storey of Alambazar Math and fanning himself with a hand-fan, he felt that the Master too must be suffering from the burning heat. He at once entered the shrine and standing near the cot of the Master fanned him till dawn. Such incidents happened not infrequently throughout his life.

For a long time a copy of the "*Vidyodaya*", then the only Sanskrit magazine in Bengal used to come to the monastery at Alambazar. Swami Ramakrishnananda was a regular reader of the periodical and liked it much. Therefore he translated into Sanskrit the sayings of Sri Ramakrishna from a Bengali book compiled by Suresh Chandra Dutta, a lay disciple of the Master. The translation was done in the *Anushtup* metre and published serially in this Sanskrit journal[5].

Whenever he got leisure after dinner at the Alambazar Math he would read Mark Twain's "*The Innocents at Home*" and "*The Innocents Abroad*". As these books were full of humour he would read them dramatically and roar with laughter. Others on hearing him would also burst into laughter and enjoy his reading. The Swami in spite of his gravity, possessed the wonderful gift of reading out books impressively and amusing his listeners beyond measure. The Swami had also a soft corner in his heart for mathematics. At Alambazar Math, after noon-day rest, he was often found to hold in his hand a slate or a piece of paper and work out mathematical problems. Sometimes he would read the *Bhagavatam* and particularly the narrative of Rishabhadeva from it. He liked the story so much that he went through it several times and got inspired while reading it. One day he called the second brother of Swami Vivekananda and said to him, "The spiritual state of Rishabhadeva is extraordinarily high and may be compared to that of a Paramahamsa". On another day the same youth who had not read any of the Vaishnava literature, in the course of a discussion with Swami Niranjanananda on the *Chaitanya-Charitamrita*, passed uncharitable remarks upon the classical Bengali work on the life and teachings of Sri Chaitanya within Swami Ramakrishnananda's hearing. Extremely annoyed at this foolish criticism, Swami Ramakrishnananda rushed to the spot and scolded the youth for his audacity, saying, "Have you read that sacred book?" The youth apologetically replied in the negative and the Swami instructed him to peruse the book first and then criticise it if he would. After reading the book thoroughly his views changed. He then went to the monastery and told the Swami of the instruction he had gained by the perusal, at which the latter was highly pleased with him. Though the incident is insignificant yet it shows how great was the Swami's respect for the sacred books and how he inspired others to read and respect them.

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[5] Vide Swami Akhandananda's Bengali work *Smritikatha* pp. 141-142, published from the Udbodhan Office, Calcutta.

One summer afternoon the same youth was reading a book written by a Christian on the lives of Christ, Buddha, and Mohammed and discussing it with Swami Shivananda. The youth was saying how the book was a comparative study of the greatness of these world-teachers. Swami Ramakrishnananda, who was then engaged in his afternoon duties in the shrine overheard all this silly comparison. He came out angrily and reprimanded the youth severely, saying, 'What are you reading, foolish fellow?' When the youth quietly told the name of the book in a frightened manner his anger cooled down, and he calmly said, "Never read such books which presume to judge these great ones, the dust of whose feet can save us. The writers of such books do not know what spiritual life is. How can they who are mere intellectuals fathom the greatness of these spiritual giants? To read or hear the criticism of these God-men is a sin." Having come in contact with one God-man in the person of Sri Ramakrishna the Swami had learned to revere other great men in the same manner.

As in Baranagore, so also in Alambazar, Swami Ramakrishnananda took the leading part in the management of the monastery. In both these places he was very hard working and spirited. He was, in a sense, the head of the monastery at Baranagore and Alambazar, and all affairs of the monastery were carried out according to his instructions. He himself did almost all the work of the monastery, and that as devoutly as he performed japam, meditation or sacred study. One day in Alambazar Math the Swami said smilingly, "You see, I dreamt last night that there were only four days more for my degree examination. I was studying hard and thinking seriously how I could get through. It is many years now since I renounced the world but the fear of examination still persists in the mind. It has gone so deep that it manifests itself in dreams. So potent are the impressions that are imprinted on our young minds that they cannot be easily obliterated."

The Vedanta work in U. S. A. spread rapidly and Swami Vivekananda found it difficult to cope with it alone. He selected Swami Ramakrishnananda as his worthy assistant and wrote to him to sail at the earliest convenience. Swami Ramakrishnananda readily agreed and made necessary preparations for departure. But as he suffered continually from skin eruptions of a dry eczematous type, Dr. Sazer, the German Homoeopath then practising at Calcutta, was consulted. The famous doctor said that in a cold country like U. S. A. one had to keep one's body always covered which would be fatal to the health of Swami Ramakrishnananda for whom a hot climate alone would be suitable. In view of the medical advice the Swami dropped the idea of his proposed voyage, and carried on his usual work at the monastery. He regularly received letters from Swami Vivekananda from U. S. A. which he would read to others with great interest. One day he received the inspired poem entitled 'Song of the Sannyasin' composed by Swami Vivekananda. He soon rendered it into beautiful Bengali verse with great care. His translation of the poem was very much appreciated in those days. Later on appeared Swami Suddhananda's rendering of the same which is now current.

Swami Ramakrishnananda's genuine love for the devotees was manifest even at the Alambazar Math. Fruits, sweets and eatables that were brought by the devotees were offered to the Lord and distributed among them. The Swami tried his best in those early days to put into practice the monastic ideal of non-possession. A sweet smile frequently played on his lips as those of a child. He was very humourous and fond of cracking jokes. A gravity coupled with the sweetness was expressed through his words and smiles. His childlike simplicity and jocularity concealed a powerful personality within. So others did not in spite of his geniality dare to cut jokes with or mix freely with him. He had a fondness for fried rice and green chillies which he would chew till the pungency made tears roll down his eyes. He never liked bread. Rice was his favourite food of which he could eat a good quantity. During his last illness while he stayed in the Udbodhan office at Calcutta he had to live on a milk diet for some days according to medical advice. Once during those days Swami Vivekananda's second brother had gone to see him. The Swami complained to him, how he had been deprived of his 'royal morsel' of rice and given only a seer and a half of milk per day and how that had resulted in the emaciation of his body. Swami Ramakrishnananda was lean in his early youth during the Baranagore Math days and grew fat and bulky only towards the end of the Alambazaar Math days.

Swami Vivekananda returned to Calcutta from the West in the latter half of February, 1897, and stayed at Seal's garden-house in the southern part of the city. At that time Swami Ramakrishnananda often visited him and spent hours in his delightful company. Though he had been unwilling to leave the monastery he eagerly attended the public meeting held in the Town Hall of Calcutta, to present an address of welcome to Swami Vivekananda. The Ramakrishna Mission was started by the latter in March, 1897. Before going to Darjeeling for a change Swami Vivekananda called aside Swami Ramakrishnananda and said, "I have given word to my friends at Madras that I shall very soon send one of my brother disciples there. I have selected you. You are to go to Madras and found a monastery there in the name of our beloved Master." Swami Ramakrishnananda pleaded no excuse. He raised no objection. He greeted the behest of the brother as the command of the Master and readily consented. So in March 1897 he started for Madras with Swami Sadananda. Thus came to an end his vigil over the Master's remains which for more than a decade had been a source of inspiration for many at Baranagore and Alambazar. But a glorious period of public life awaited him at Madras.

CHAPTER VI

FOUNDING THE MONASTERY AT MADRAS

SWAMI Vivekananda landed at Colombo in January, 1897, after his epoch-making tour in the West. He delivered lectures at Colombo and other places in Ceylon, and then travelled northwards halting on the way at various places and reached Madras on the sixth of the next month. He stayed there for nine days in *Castle Kernan* otherwise known as the *Ice House*, situated east of the recently constructed Lady Wellingdon Training College for women. The Swami was welcomed in the city with great enthusiasm and ovation and his lectures and discourses were so impressive that there was a genuine desire on the part of the people to learn more of the teachings of his Master. So, some citizens approached Swami Vivekananda to send some one of his brother disciples to establish a monastery at Madras to carry on the work he had started. Chief among those who took interest in the founding of the monastery there, were V. Krishnaswami Iyer, later a member of the Madras Governor's Executive Council, and P. R. Sundaram Iyer, a Judge of the Madras High Court. In response to the request of these leading citizens, the Swami, while coming down the staircase of the Castle Kernan said, "I shall send you one who is more orthodox than your most orthodox men of the South and who is at the same time unique and unsurpassed in his worship and meditation of God.' The Swami had Swami Ramakrishnananda in his mind.

In those days there was no direct railway communication between Calcutta and Madras. Swami Ramakrishnananda as desired by his illustrious brother, left his favourite work viz., the daily worship of the Master at the monastery, then at Alambazar, and got on board a steamer with Swami Sadananda and arrived in Madras at the end of March, 1897. He was warmly received by Alasinga Perumal and other devotees. A house was rented in the Ice House Road and he S wami was temporarily accommodated there. It was a two-storeyed building named 'Flora Cottage' now demolished. The Swami carried with him a framed photo of Sri Ramakrishna from the Alambazar Math. As soon as he arrived there, he established the Shrine where the photo was installed and performed daily worship as at the monastery at Alambazar or Baranagore. This is the beginning of the Madras Math which has since developed into one of the foremost religious institutions of the Madras Presidency, if not of South India. The finances of the monastery were provided by a few devoted disciples, prominent among whom was Bhaskara Setupati, the Raja of Ramnad Soon the Swami began his activities and in June shifted his residence to some of the lower rooms of Castle Kernan sanctified by Swami Vivekananda's stay, and facing the famous beach of Madras. This three-storeyed building[1] belonged to one S. Biligiri Aiyangar, an attorney-at-law, who had endeared himself to Swami Vivekananda and offered the free use of the ground floor of his Castle for the monastery. Biligiri Aiyangar was one of the supporters of the Math in its early days and made a provision in his will for the payment of Rs. 12/- per month to Swami Ramakrishnananda.

Swami Ramakrishnananda was a grand man to look at. He had an attractive personality and though he was then really thirty four he appeard to be much younger. His face was round, tender and smiling with a strong and firm chin. His lips were thick and his eyes, though not large, were ever beaming with intelligence and sweetness. He had a broad chest and a good round belly. He had strong and stout limbs and a majestic gait. While going to his classes he used to put on a long coat which would come below the knee and a turban with its long end falling over his shoulders. He did not put on shoes but carried a stick in his hand.

In the *Prabuddha Bharata* for April, 1897 appeared this announcement: "Swami Ramakrishnananda and Sadananda have come to Madras to work out Swami Vivekananda's plans and they will shortly open Gita and Vedanta classess." The *Brahmavadin* for April 24th, of the same year, published a summary of the Swami's inaugural address on the 'Necessity of Religious Education in Youth' delivered at the Aryan Association, Mint Street, Madras. In the course of this address the Swami observed: "Religion takes man to God by making God of a man ... Religion is the highest Chemistry; for it analyses the compound man into the elements, ego and non-ego, the self and the not self, the soul and the body ... Religion is the burning furnace in which is burnt up all the dross of his heart." He pointed out that youth is the proper age for the practice of religion saying, "The heart of a young man is very pure, and so it is a fit reservoir for religion to flow in and every young man therefore is a fit candidate for a place in the heavenly office of religion." He made it clear that though religoin was the most practical of all sciences it had been brought down to the level of mere dialectics. Hence he exhorted the youth of Madras to make religion practical in life and observed that an unlettered religious man was far superior to a mere learned man.

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[1] As we have already said it was otherwise known as the American Ice House. It was a large building with phenomenally thick walls and constructed by an American Company for the storage of Ice to be supplied to the people o Madras. As the undertaking proved a failure the house was afterwards converted into a dwelling.

In the middle of 1897 Swami Akhandananda was engaged in the relief work of the famine-stricken villages in Bengal. Swami Ramakrishnananda published several appeals for funds in the *Brahmavadin* of June and July and collected some money for the same. On the 16th July the Swami lectured to the 'Young men's Hindu Association' on 'Bhakti Yoga.' In his learned lecture, the Swami defined Bhakti as the highest phase of love in which the lover and the beloved become assimilated. Regarding the object of love he observed, "The love which proceeds from the infinite soul of man must have an infinite object for his veneration and as God is the only Infinite, that object is God." Then the Swami described how as the lover loses himself with the gradual intensity of devotion in the ocean of the Infinite, his beloved, his individuality diminishes and at last vanishess. When the highest state of love is reached the devotee never feel separate from God, but sees Him in everything. The Swami concluded that in becoming a perfect Bhakta one becomes a perfect Jnani.'

A series of popular lectures were delivered by him at this Association on the lives and teachings of Chaitanya, Ramanuja, Sankara, Buddha, Zoroaster, and Mohammed.[2] These lectures dealt with these great men in a spirit of broadminded tolerance. They were serially published in the pages of the *Brahmavadin* of 1897–98. Every *Ekadasi* day a *bhajana* was held at the Math and devotees interested in *Hari Sankirtan* took part in it. On Sunday, September 29,[3] a Vedanta class was opened by the Swami in Dewan Bahadur Rajratna Mudaliar's School, Chintadripet. The Swami also expounded the Gita every Sunday evening for an hour and then held a question class for the next half an hour. The class was well attended by officials and students of the Colleges and High schools. At the anniversary celebration of the 'Young Men's Hindu Association' held on the evening of 15th January, 1898, Swami Ramakrishnananda read a paper on Bhagavan Ramakrishna Paramahamsa with the Hon. Mr. Justice Subramanya Iyer in the chair. In the course of this very interesting lecture the Swami "laid special stress on the religious catholicity of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, his humility, and his love for mankind."

In the same year Swami Ramakrishnananda went on a pilgrimage to Rameswaram. After his return from the pilgrimage he began his work of teaching and lecturing with renewed vigour. He taught the Upanishads to 20 students at Mylapore and for about that number at Triplicane.[4] He held a Gita class at Chintadripet for a large number of students. Many of these who attended his classes were graduates. More and more interest was evinced by the students, and some students of his Gita class wanted to undergo a regular course in Sanskrit. The Swami spoke on the Sankhya and the Gita at the Y. M. H. A. in the early part of January, 1898, and began to have calls from various associations in Madras and Saidapet to lecture on Hindu Philosophy and Religion. The attendance at his lectures and classes gradually increased and he became a popular figure in the religious circles of the city.

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[2] Vide *Brahmavadin*, Oct. 1897. [3] Vide *Prabuddha Bharata*, Oct. 1897.

[4] Vide *Brahmavadin* for January, 1898.

The first grand celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday was conducted by Swami Ramakrishnananda at Madras in 1899 at the monastery at the Castle Kernan. On the 13th March the *Tithipuja* and the celebration were conducted by the Swami. Even in the first year this celebration was of a quasi-public character as more than 500 people, chiefly composed of the students of the Swami's classes, participated in it and were fed. Grand as the whole day's proceedings were, grander was the public celebration which was held on Sunday, the 19th March for the convenience of the general public. On that day the whole Castle was the scene of a great bustle and activity and there was a large gathering of men from 6 A.M. to 9 P.M. The programme was so arranged that those who attended the *Mahotsava* had something or other to engage them throughout the day. From 7 to 9 A.M. there was puja. The photo of Sri Ramakrishna was gorgeously decked in flowers and placed on an elevated seat facing the east in the hall of the second floor of the castle and the puja conducted there. From 8 to 10 A. M. there was *Hari Sankirtan* when a number of Bhajana parties assembled in the hall and sang with musical accompaniments the glory of God. The next item in the programme was the feeding of the *Daridra Narayanas*. More than three thousand of the poor of all classes were fed in the regular Hindu fashion in the compound of the Castle. In the evening there was a large concourse of men at about 3–30 P. M. to hear the *Hari Katha Prasanga* on the life of Nanda, the Pariah Saint followed by an able and eloquent discourse by Prof. M. Rangacharya on the place of Sri Ramakrishna in the history of religion which lasted for more than an hour and a half. With the distribution of '*pan-supari*' and fruits and sweets and with cries of 'Jai Sri Ramakrishna' the Mahotsava was closed for the year.[5]

The sixty-seventh birth day of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated at Madras in 1900 in a way which is a good index of Swami Ramakrishnananda's work there. Swami Ramakrishnananda started the celebration in 1898 and since then every year it has been a regular festival of ever-increasing grandeur and beauty. " This is certainly due " the *Brahmavadin* for May, 1900 editorially observes, "to the presence of Swami Ramakrishnananda. The slow, steady, silent and useful work that he had been doing, the quiet, unostentatious exemplary life of complete renunciation that he has been leading, and the broad catholicity of views he has imbibed from his Master has made him deservedly popular amongst all classes of men." On 3rd March the birthday was observed with puja all through the day and with *homa* in the night. The Sunday following was the day of public celebration which went off much more grandly than in the previous year. From 6 P.M. of the preceeding day, the Castle Kernan was a scene of great bustle and preparation for the godly work of the next day. The feeding of over 5000 poor began at 8 A.M. and ended to the satisfaction of all at 4 P.M. Amongst the poor who were fed were Christians and Mussalmans, Fakirs and Vairagis. The Swami and his small group of devoted workers worked hard for days without sleep, rest or even food ! From 300 to 400 gentlemen visitors took their meal in the Math on the day. Towards the evening there was *Hari-Katha* at the close of which Swami Ramakrishnananda read a short paper on the life of Sri Ramakrishna. This done, at the request of the Swami, Mr. V. Krishnaswami Iyer addressed the audience on the teachings of the saint whose birthday was so grandly celebrated.

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[5] Vide *Brahmavadin*, March 15, 1899.

In the latter half of 1900 Swami Ramakrishnananda re-opened his classes after a vacation of two months. The programme, was as follows ;- Sunday: Gita, morning 7 to 8-30 at Purasawakam; Gita, afternoon 4-30 to 6 at Egmore; Bhagavatam, night 7 to 8-30 at Chintadripet. Monday: Gita, morning 7 to 8-30 at Komaleswaranpet; Upanishads, night 7 to 8-30 at the Castle Kernan, Triplicane. Tuesday: afternoon 5-30 to 7 Gita at Y. M. H. A. Wednesday: Gita, morning 7 to 8-30 at Triplicane. Thursday: Upanishads, night 7 to 8–30 at the Castle Kernan, Triplicane. Friday: Upanishads, night 7 to 8–30 at the Castle Kernan; and Saturday: Upanishads, morning 7 to 8–30 at Mylapore, Gita, night 6–30 to 8 at Saidapet.

As days passed by, Swami Ramakrishnananda's following became larger and his name became a household word in the city. How punctual and regular he was in his classes! He would always be five minutes before the time in his class-room, and would conduct the class with the same enthusiasm even when the attendance was very small. Some times there would be none except himself and he would spend the whole hour in meditation and quietly return to the Math afterwards. The devotion he showed on such occasions to the work of the Lord was more eloquent and effective than the preaching of others.

Swami Ramakrishnananda's activities were not confined to the city of Madras; they spread throughout the Presidency; nay all over the South India.

It is learnt from the *Brahmavadin* for November, 1901, that besides his quiet, laborious and useful work at Madras, there were six Vivekananda Societies at Vaniyambadi, Nikundi, Arasampatthi, Barur, Krishnagiri, and Dharmapuri started and worked under his guidance. These societies organised lectures and conducted regular classes on Vedanta, performed pujas and bhajanas and did the work of educating and feeding the poor. Swami Ramakrishnananda also recognised the splendid work of the Vivekananda Sangham at Cuddalore old town established in January, 1906.[6]

The 69th birthday of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated at Madras in 1902 at the residence of Babu Kalipada Ghose which lay opposite the 'Presentation Convent' and very near the Madras Municipal Office. Mr. Ghose, a lay disciple of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, was then the agent of Messrs John Dickinson. More than 300 students and friends of Swami Ramakrishnananda attended the celebration. The whole house put on a gay appearance and the programme began early in the morning of the 16th March with the usual puja by the Swami and bhajana. Then about 7000 poor people of all castes and creeds were sumptuously fed. After a *Hari Katha* by Mr. Venkatarama Iyer a report of the Mission work in the Southern India was read, and Swami Ramakrishnananda delivered a learned and philosophical lecture on 'Unity in Variety', and Prof. M. Rangachariar of the Presidency College, Madras, took the chair. The Swami first analysed the world of experience from the standpoint of physics as well as metaphysics, and showed that Unity in Variety is the law of nature. "The Universe also generally appears to be manifest" concluded the Swami "but an examination of all that constitutes its foundations, when that examination is full and rational, is sure is to lead us to the realisation of that which is one only without a second".[7]

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[6] Vide the *Prabuddha Bharata* for February, 1906.

Swami Vivekananda passed away on 4th July, 1902 at the Belur Math and his memorial meeting was held at the Pachaiyappa's College, Madras, in the same month, with the Hon'ble Mr. Ananda Charlu in the Chair. After the speeches made by the chairman, V. Krishnaswami Iyer, V. C. Seshachariar, P. R. Sundarm Iyer and others, Swami Ramakrishnananda made an earnest appeal to the citizens of Madras assembled in the meeting for help towards the establishment of an 'Ananda Mandir' in Madras to perpetuate the hallowed memory of the illustrious Swami Vivekananda. In the course of the appeal, the Swami observed, "The world outside needs the light of wisdom of our Rishis quite as much as we do in India, and I am anxious to see an 'Ananda Mandir' rise somewhere in a conspicuous part of the city from where that light may be made to radiate in ever-increasing brilliance to all near as well as distant regions so as to take away the overshadowing darkness of ignorance which is indeed responsible for all the weaknesses and miseries of man."

The celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's 70th birthday was held on the 1st of March, 1903 and on the following Sunday. On the first day there was puja and celebration of a private character. More than 600 people gathered in this connection in Castle Kernan and Swami Ramakrishnananda had made adequate arrangements for feeding them. The formula of worship devised by him was very broad and catholic and suited to the spirit of universal harmony of which Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna was the embodiment.

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[7] For the full text of the lecture see the *Brahmavadin* for March, 1902.

The public celebration was conducted on a grander scale on the second day. The whole of Castle Kernan was the scene of great bustle and activity. It vibrated with piety, holiness and devotion of a very large gathering from 6 A.M. to 9 P.M. A photo of Sri Ramakrishna was placed on an elevated platform gorgeously decorated with flowers and foliage. The day opened with singing by several *Hari Sankirtan* parties with musical accompaniments. The next item in the programme was the feeding of more than six thousand *Daridra Narayans* of all castes and creeds. Men vied with each other in this divine service of poor-feeding, the worship of the *Virat*. In the evening a large concourse of men met at about 3 P.M. to hear the *Hari Katha prasanga* on Draupadi's self-surrender. A short report of the progress of the Ramakrishna Mission in Madras and other places in the South India was read by a student of Swami Ramakrishnananda's. This was followed by a short and suggestive lecture on the life of the great Master and Teacher of mankind by Mr. G. Venkataranga Rao and a short discourse on the glory of Sannyasa by the chairman Prof. Rangachariar. With the distribution of sweets and fruits and the cries of 'Jai Ramakrishna' the Mahotsava closed for the year.[8]

The first celebaration of Swami Vivekananda's birthday was held at Madras in 1903 on the second floor of Castle Kernan. There was bhajana and recitation of devotional songs in the morning. Then the great Swami's picture was gorgeously decorated with flowers and foliage and worshipped and more than 500 people were fed. Towards the evening many of Swamiji's old friends as well as a good number of Swami Ramakrishnananda's students gathered and talked about Swamiji's wonderful and soul-stirring life. Messrs Krishnaswami Iyer and Sundarayyar and Prof. Rangacharya made the evening specially inspiring by relating a number of interesting reminiscences of Swamiji. After the closing *arati* there was distribution of prasad. Swami

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[8] Vide the *Brahmavadin* for March, 1903.

Ramakrishnananda was mainly responsible for the success of the celebaration.[9]

Thus the celebration had a good beginning in 1903. But it assumed much bigger and grander form in 1904. That year a beautiful bromide enlargement of Swami Vivekananda's photo was splendidly decorated with a variety of flowers and placed in one of the spacious halls of the Castle Kernan. The proceedings began with worship by Swami Ramakrishnananda at 6 A. M. and bhajana commencing at 10 A. M. lasted till 2 P. M. At this time a thousand poor were sumptuously fed. There were recitals of a few national Bengali songs by Swami Paramananda and *aradhana* by Pundit Srinivasa Tathachariar. The latter during his performance composed in Sanskrit extempore verses on the greatness of Swamiji. Towards the evening there was a large gathering of the students of Swami Ramakrishnananda and many friends of Swami Vivekananda who had conversations among themselves on the life and message of the great Swami. The celebration closed with arati and distribution of prasad.[10]

The 72nd birthday anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated at the Castle Kernan on Sunday the 12th March, 1905 in a pandal specially erected for the purpose. The day began with puja by Swami Ramakrishnananda which was attended by all classes of Hindus. Bhajana and poor-feeding continued from morning 7 o'clock to 3 in the evening. From 3 to 5 *Hari Katha* performance of 'Rukmini Kalyanam' was given by a young graduate, Mr. T. Krishnamacharya. At about 5 P.M, a largely attended meeting was held under the chairmanship of the Honourable Mr. L. A. Govindaraghava Iyer. Mr. Ramanuja Iyengar read a report of the work done by Swami Ramakrishnananda in Madras and elsewhere. After that an instructive paper was read on Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna and his message to the world by Mr. R. A. Krishnamacharya. The chairman then delivered a long and instructive address in the course of which he pointed out the importance of Sri

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[9] Vide *Brahmavadin* for February, 1903.

[10] Vide *Brahmavadin* for February, 1904.

Ramakrishna's message. With the usual vote of thanks to the chair and the distribution of prasad, the celebration was brought to a close.[11]

The Madras Math celebrated the birthday of Swami Vivekananda with great success in 1906. The novel feature introduced that year by Swami Ramakrishnananda was the feeding of more than a hundred cows. Food was next served to about 3000 poor people and prasad was distributed to about one hundred gentlemen. There was Sankirtana from morning till about 2 P.M. Under the presidentship of Mr. Justice Sankaran Nair a learned and interesting lecture was delivered by Mr. Ramaswami Sastri before an audience drawn chiefly from the educated community of the city. After *aratrika* and distribution of prasad to about 100 gentlemen the proceedings were brought to a close.[12]

On the death of Mr. Biligiri Iyengar the original owner, the Ice House came up for auction. The devotees felt that if it passed into the hands of a stranger, Swami Ramakrishnananda was likely to be put to the necessity of moving to another place. So they became anxious and desired that if possible some devotees of the Math should purchase it. But though a devotee was a bidder it was purchased by a zamindar. When the auction was proceeding Swami Ramakrishnananda sat unconcerned in a far end of the compound on a long backless bench, away from the crowd that had gathered. One devotee who watched the bidding occasionally went up to the Swami and told him how it was progressing. The Swami looked up to him and said, "Why do you worry about it? What do we care who buys or who sells? My wants are few. I need only a small room for Sri Guru Maharaj. I can stay anywhere and spend my time in speaking about him." As it was anticipated Swami Ramakrishnananda subsequently had to vacate the portion in the main building occupied by him and to shift to a small out-house in the compound where he lived till he moved to Mylapore. In the Ice House not only had Swami Vivekananda stopped for nine days but Swami Ramakrishnananda also spent about ten years. When Swami

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[11] Vide the *Brahmavadin* for March, 1905.

[12] Vide the *Prabuddha Bharata* for February, 1906.

Brahmananda visited Madras in 1908 he regretted that the house so sanctified could not be procured for the monastery.

Within five years of his arrival in Madras Swami Ramakrishnananda became popular in the city and his work as we have seen, was appreciated on all sides. As early as 1902 a public meeting was held in the Pachaiyappa's College building. The meeting was well attended by the citizens of Madras and resolutions were passed for collecting funds for the erection of a Math. Swami Ramakrishnananda did not spare himself in the matter of the collection of funds for the building. He himself had to take the lead and accompanied by one or two young devotees went from door to door in Triplicane, Mylapore and other parts of the city. The response was so poor that it took him two years to realise Rs. 1700. Then Mr. V. Krishnaswami Iyer issued a fresh appeal which had a slow but steady response. With the collections in hand, the construction of a building was undertaken in 1906 on a small site on the Brodies Road obtained free through the kindness of the late Akul Kondiah Chettiar, an ardent admirer and student of the Swami. On an auspicious day Swami Ramakrishnananda conducted the religious ceremonies and Swami Abhedananda, who happened at the time to be there after his first visit to the West, laid the foundation stone.

Mr. A. S. Balasubramanya Iyer took charge of the work. The building was ready for occupation in November, 1907. The total expense for the construction of the building was Rs. 5500, though the collections had amounted then to only Rs. 4100. The deficit had to be met later with great difficulty. Swami Ramakrishnananda moved to the new building on Sunday, the 17th Nov. 1907. Early in the morning of the day chosen, A. S. Balasubramanya Iyer's carriage waited at the entrance to the Ice House. The Swami took the picture of Sri Guru Maharaj and proceeded to the car. As it was drizzling he asked a devotee to hold the umbrella carefully to protect the picture from the rains till he got into the carriage. After a quiet drive the Swami arrived at the new building at Mylapore.

It was a square one-storied building tinted red, and stood on a high foundation and had a large terrace. Inside there was a spacious hall with four little rooms at the corners. From the hall a door led to an open court where there was another building containing the kitchen, dining-room and bath-room. The two eastern rooms were the shrines of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. The room diagonally opposite the former was where Swami Ramakrishnananda lived. The other room was occupied by Swami Brahmananda when he was there in 1908. The hall was the office of the Swami, the sitting-room for all, including visitors, and also the bed-room for other monastic inmates. As the building was badly cracked within two years it was finally demolished in 1914 and replaced by the present two-storeyed building in 1917. The old building stood just where the Vilva tree of the Math now stands.

Swami Ramakrishnananda was elated like a child to be in the new building. His joy was reflected in his face and manifested in his words and actions. He said, " This is a fine house for Sri Guru Maharaj to live in. Realising that He occupies it, we must ever keep it very clean and very pure. We should take care never to disfigure the walls by driving in nails or otherwise. Do you see ? ". Sri Guru Maharaj was duly installed in the shrine and worshipped. *Abhishekam* and special offering were made to Sri Kapaleswara. The Swami said humorously sometime later on : " Till now I was in Triplicane and Parthasarathy subjected me to many trials ; but now Kapaleswara has drawn me to Him. You know He is the Lord of Bhikkhus as His name means and He is sure to protect me hereafter." Poor people were fed and an assembly of Pundits was called to chant the scriptures and discourse on religious subjects. In the evening a meeting was held at which Sri P. S. Sivaswami Iyer spoke at the request of the Swami. After *aratrika* and distribution of *prasad* the day's function came to a close.[13]

In the early part of his stay at the Ice House the Swami was his own cook and his own servant. For pecuniary difficulties were so great that it was not possible for him to maintain a cook or even a servant. The Swami held classes in different parts of the city and visitors to the Math were many. The livelong day was one of constant service to God. But at Mylapore a cook was appointed. Whenever anyone came from outside he had to wash his feet and enter the precincts with reverence. If a stranger, ignorant of the observance, happened to come in without doing so, the Swami would make it a point after his departure to have water sprinkled over the place trodden by him. In this way he was particular in preserving the sanctity of the monastery. He took great care to see that everyone, even a coolie, who came to the Math received a share of *prasadam* and for this he kept always ready sweet coconut laddus offered to the Lord.

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[13] Vide ' Rao Saheb C. Ramaswami Iyengar's 'Reminiscences of Swami Ramakrishnananda' in the *Vedanta Kesari* for August, 1928

In the early period of his work in Madras the Swami had to do puja, cooking and all the household work himself. His classes were scattered in distant parts of the city and to many of them he used to go on foot taking a long time. On certain days of the week he had two or three classes and so he would return to the Math too tired to cook his food even. On such a night his meal was very simple and consisted probably of a little bread. But none except himself was aware of his difficulties. Only a few of his students who frequented the Math and who were closely associated with him knew of them and volunteered to remove them. He would not easily accept even the proffered help. He would not allow his students who had only moderate incomes to undergo any sacrifice for his sake.

Questioned as to how he maintained the monastery he would reply with a striking composure, " God sends me whenever I want anything." This he said from his own practical experience, of which the following incident is an illustration. One day there was not a drop of ghee to fry his chapati. He was calmly pacing up and down the verandah not knowing from where the help would come. Just then, quite unexpecetedly, a student of his approached him gently and conveyed his intention to contribute his mite to the Math and implored him to tell him the form the help should take. The Swami characteristically demurred at first but on the insistence of the student said, ' Let me have one *viss* of ghee.' This contribution in kind he received every month from the student ever afterwards regularly. When his friends and followers at Madras came at last to know of the stuff he was made of, they came forward to look after the finances of the Math.[14]

How Swami Ramakrishnananda worked hard and underwent endless difficulties to establish the monastery at Madras is partly indicated by an eye witness as follows. "The Swami had to face infinite odds in going to the classes. In the time of his sojourn in these parts there were no buses and tram cars. There was a peculiar kind of *jutka*, not of the type we have now. It was a sort of small box into which three had to squeeze themselves; one would sit at the entrance and the other two opposite to him just at the back of the driver's seat. The entrance into the jutka was very narrow and the box was fitted in a slanting way so that the passengers had always to learn the lesson of alertness not to slip and knock against another. It was a funny sight to see Swami Ramakrishnananda entering the jutka with his stout and robust body squeezing himself and bending his head. These jutkas were not available near the Ice House and often the Swami had to walk up to a jutka stand, a mile off in the Triplicane bazaar, nor had he always the requisite money to hire one. He had then to go all the way to Chintadripet which could be reached only through the Mount Road. But Mount Road was then a low-lying place and was often under water and the Swami had to wade knee-deep and sometimes hip-deep in water to go to the classes. Through the grace of his Guru on whom he fully depended, a Harijan *jutka-walla* came forward to take the Swami and ever since used to appear at the appointed time to take the Swami to the class and bring him back to the Math.[15]

From 1897 to 1910, Swamis Sadananda, Paramananda, Vimalananda, Bodhananda, Achalananda, Atmananda, Sharvananda, Swaprakasananda,

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[14] Vide P. Manikkaswami Mudaliar's 'Reminiscences of Swami Ramakrishnananda' in the *Vedanta Kesari* for July, 1922.

[15] Vide P. Manikkaswami's 'Reminiscences of Swami Ramakrishnananda' in the *Vedanta Kesari* for Sept. 1946

Dhyanananda, Madhavananda and others worked under Swami Ramakrishnananda at the Ice House or Mylapore Math. All of them are unanimously of opinion that Swami Ramakrishnananda was a strict disciplinarian and a hard task-master. During his time the daily routine of the Madras Math was arranged in this way. All inmates had to get up early at 5 A.M., finish the morning ablutions and practise meditations in their rooms. Swami Ramakrishnananda would first go to the shrine, make offerings to Sri Guru Maharaj and then close the door of the shrine. Next he would go to his own room and chant the Chandi and Gita every morning. After the lapse of half an hour or so, a Bramacharin would remove the offering from Sri Ramakrishna's shrine and place it before Swamiji's picture which was installed in another room at the Mylapore Math. Subsequently both the shrine rooms were swept, wiped and cleaned. The vessels used in worship were scoured with ash and tamarind and washed. In the meantime a Brahmacharin would prepare tea and all would sit according to seniority on a carpet to take it. After tea Swami Ramakrishnananda would dress and cut vegetables for the midday offering and ask one to read a sacred book. Once the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali was read by Swami Sharvananda. The reader would read aloud each aphorism and the Swami would explain it. Others would eagerly listen to his discourse. This went on for an hour or so. In this way he combined worship with work. Then the inmates would perform their respective duties or attend to any urgent business. Punctually each day at 11 o'clock the Swami would enter the Shrine for worship and at about half past eleven the noon offering was made to Sri Guru Maharaj. By half past twelve offerings were brought out and the Shrine was closed and all sat for their meal. After the meal all would take rest for a couple of hours. At about 3 o'clock the Swami would get up and call others to him for a religious class. All would sit on the floor and a sacred book was read by one and explained by the Swami. Once Swami Paramananda read *Chaitanya Charitamrita* and the Swami, while explaining it, quoted parallel instances and sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. On such occasions he would narrate with emotion the religious practices of the direct disciples of the Master in the early days of their monastic life. Punctually at 4 P.M. the shrine rooms were opened and the afternoon offerings were made. The Swami was very keen in the observance of punctuality in the matter of making offerings and did not allow the deviation of even a minute. At dusk all would assemble in the shrine and attend the evening service and then practise meditation. At 8-30 the night offering was made and at 9 the shrine was closed and then all had their food. After that all would gather around the Swami and do some personal service to him or enjoy his company. During that time he would relate something of the life of Sri Ramakrishna or of Swamiji. After some time spent in this manner all retired for the night's rest. The Swami expected the inmates to be very punctual and attentive and quick in the performance of their daily duties. Even a slight inadvertance on the part of anyone would bring down a severe scolding from him.

Once Swami Sharvananda was severely scolded by the senior Swami for a trivial fault. Not accustomed to such harsh type of scolding the junior Swami broke down. Seeing him weep, the senior Swami at once softened and began to say in a very affiectionate tone : "Do you know what Sri Ramakrishna used to say? A blacksmith first puts a lump of iron into fire and when it becomes redhot he puts it on the anvil and beats it into a shape. That is how an unformed lump of metal is shaped into an useful article! You all are like that unformed lump and it is for your good that you are put in the forge and beaten to a form by such scoldings. It is all for your benefit." The gentle voice of the senior heartened the junior. The very next day of the incident when all sat for meal, nice Malgova mangoes were served. The biggest one was offered to Swami Ramakrishnananda. As soon as he tasted a little of the big mango served on his plate he exclaimed, 'Oh, how sweet it is! Exceedingly tasteful! Take it my boy.' With these words melting almost into motherly affection he put that biggest mango on the plate of Swami Sharvananda. That single touch of affection revealed his loving heart hidden behind his rough exterior. "From that moment forward" confesses Swami Sharvananda, "none of his scoldings and chastisements did hurt me or wound my self-respect, in as much as I could feel always that behind those stern words and grim face reposed a most loving heart and tender affection which even a fond mother could not harbour."

Though Swami Ramakrishnananda's method of training was hard, his whole heart was set on the spiritual unfoldment of the novitiate. He did not brook any contradiction or refusal and wanted implicit obedience from the young inmates. At the same time he encouraged every good feeling or action on their part. One winter Swami Paramananda had given away his woollen wrapper to a poor shivering boy of the local Students' Home and was noticed by Swami Ramakrishnananda to go about on a chilly rainy day with nothing but a thin shirt over his body. When the senior Swami came to know of the junior Swami's tender heart he wrote to Swami Premananda to send him the best wrapper that he could find in Calcutta. Accordingly a lovely flame-coloured shawl was sent by Swami Premananda to Madras and Swami Paramananda took the present to America in loving memory of Swami Ramakrishnananda.[16]

As long as Swami Ramakrishnananda was at Madras the birth-day anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated there every year with special enthusiasm under his direct guidance. On account of the presence of Swami Brahmananda, the then President of the Mission, the observance of the anniversary in 1909 at the Mylapore Math was more than usually impressive. The private celebration on the birth-day proper which fell on 22nd February, assumed almost the proportions of a public function. A large number of devotees and friends gathered at the Math during the day specially at the time of *Homa* which was performed by Swami Ramakrishnananda at four o'clock, after which a generous collation was served to all present. The distribution of prasad, sacred singing and dancing went on until after midnight.

On the following Sunday, the public celebration was held. Before eight o'clock in the morning Bhajana parties began to arrive at the

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[16] Vide Sister Devamata's ***Swami Paramananda and His Work*** p. 60.

Mylapore Math, and throughout the forenoon the chanting of the name of the Lord continued before a large picture of Sri Ramakrishna which had been placed on a high platform at the end of the hall and completely enbowered with flowers. Dinner was afterwards served to all who had participated in the function; and about five thousand *Daridranarayanas* were fed at a neighbouring market. In the afternoon *Harikatha* was done for a pretty long time before a large gathering. At half past five the general meeting was convened when the hall was over-crowded and its doors and windows were blocked by people standing outside. Dr. M. C. Nanjunda Rao, one of the leading physicians of the city, read an exceptionally instructive and thoughtful paper on the realisations of Sri Ramakrishna in the light of modern psychology. The eminent lawyer, Hon. V. Krishnaswami Iyer, who presided, brought the meeting to a close with an excellent address. *Aratrikam* was performed and then the prasad was distributed.[17]

Swami Premananda visited Madras in 1906. Swami Brahmananda visiting in 1908, went on a pilgrimage to Rameswaram accompanied by Swami Ramakrishnananda.

At the earnest prayer of Swami Ramakrishnananda, the Holy Mother visited South India in the early part of 1910. For this purpose she arrived at Madras at the end of Feb. of that year with a party of eight. The Swami accorded a cordial reception to her at Madras where she spent about a month and then accompanied her to Madura and Rameswaram. The Holy Mother stayed at Rameswaram for three days and worshipped Lord Shiva there with one hundred and eight vilwa leaves made of gold which were procured specially for her by Swami Ramakrishnananda. The Raja of Ramnad, one of her great devotees, ordered his officer there to show her his palatial buildings and treasures and present to her anything she liked to accept. When requested to choose something, she simply said, "Sashi has arranged for everything I require." The Holy Mother, on her return to Madras, was taken by Swami Ramakrishnananda to Bangalore and accommodated in the

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[17] Vide the *Prabuddha Bharata* for April, 1909

Ashrama building. After completing her tour in the South she returned to Calcutta in the first week of April, 1910.

Overwork ruined the Swami's health and diabetes troubled him for the last two years. After the Holy Mother's departure from Madras he got slow fever, and went to Bangalore for a change. At Bangalore the doctor diagnosed his case as galloping phthisis and being so advised the Swami went to Calcutta where he passed away.

Swami Ramakrishnananda consecrated his life and took the message of his Master to the doors of the rich and poor alike. He toiled and moiled in Madras in particular and South India in general to raise people from their low state to the high ideal of life enjoined in the Scriptures. He tried his best to turn the attention of the people to the meaning and genesis of good old customs so much neglected now-a-days and exhorted them to observe them. He himself set the example by observing the round of all religious festivities in strict accordance with the Shastras, by keeping fasts, by making japam and by bathing in the sea on eclipse days, etc. He taught people not only by precept but also by example. He shed his heart's blood for the Lord's work at Madras and died for the cause.

On account of the Christian Missionary propaganda and English education people had lost faith in our religion and turned agnostic and sceptic. Hence the work of Swami Ramakrishnananda in Madras bristled with insurmountable difficulties. He deprecated the existence of hostilities between Vaishnavism and Shaivism, and between *Thengalai* and *Vadagalai* sects and availed himself of every opportunity to remove them. He strained every nerve to broaden the views of the narrow-minded Hindus and encourage them to understand their religion according to the needs of time. He had a rocky soil to cultivate at Madras and his labours were not rewarded in his life time. But it cannot be denied that the seeds he sowed there are bearing fruit slowly and steadily.

"During the last decade of the 19th century and the opening of the twentieth century" observes an old citizen[18] of Madras "one of the most prominent persons in the sphere of religious activity was Swami Ramakrishnananda. His passing away has created a void in the hearts of his admirers and devotees in Madras—a void which still remains a void and will remain so while the world lasts."

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[18] P. Manikkaswami Mudaliar. Vide his 'Reminiscenes of Swami Ramakrishnananda' in the *Vedanta Kesari* for August, 1937.

CHAPTER VII

BUILDING A MONASTERY AT BANGALORE

THE work of Swami Ramakrishnananda in Mysore is a landmark in his life. Swami Vivekananda had visited Mysore in 1892 before proceeding to America as a representative of Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions held at Chicago. At Mysore he was the guest of its distinguished minister, Sir K. Seshadri Iyer, for about a month and met His Highness Chamaraja Wodeyar, the then Maharaja of the state and succeeded in awakening the interest of the people in the Hindu religion. In honour of Swami Vivekananda's success at Chicago, Bangalore organised a public meeting in September, 1894, and congratulated him on his splendid work. But for the next nine years there was no activity worth mentioning in Mysore in this direction.

In July, 1903 Swami Ramakrishnananda was invited by the Vedanta Society of Ulsoor in Bangalore. The Swami accepted the invitation, reached Bangalore on the 19th July at 6 A.M. and stayed there till the 9th August. About four thousand people including fifty-three Bhajana parties gave him a royal reception at the Cantonment Railway station and followed him in a three-mile-long procession through the principal streets of the Cantonment and arrived at the Clarendon Hall at about 10 A.M. During this period the Swami delivered more than a dozen lectures and held question-classes morning and evening. These lectures[1] were attended by eager audience of not less than a thousand persons, and his classes attracted scores of people, sometimes hundreds. On July 27th, the Swami had an interview with His Highness Sri Krishnarajendra Wodeyar, the Maharaja of Mysore. A typed copy of Swami Vivekananda's letter from Chicago to His Highness's father was procured by the Swami and read out to His Highness during the interview. His Highness said that it was a rare privilege to greet a co-disciple of Swami Vivekananda in Swami Ramakrishnananda. After blessing His Highness, Swami Ramakrishnananda gave him some *prasadam* of Sri Guru Maharaj and presented some books. His Highness received them reverentially. The highest officers of the state presided over his lectures. He was given two farewell addresses by the Union High School Literary Association and the Bangalore public on August 8 and 9 respectively, the latter being held in the compound of the District Office under the Chairmanship of Sri P. N. Krishnamurthi, Dewan of the state. M. A. Narayana Iyengar, who was an eye-witness, writes,[2] "The Swami appeared so inspired during the whole period that he actually electrified his audiences into a newer and more forceful appreciation of the grand truths of our Religion Eternal. A strong wave of spirituality was

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[1] On July 25 the Swami delivered a lecture at the Central College on the '*Message of Sri Ramakrishna to the World*' under the presidentship of Sir P. N. Krishnamurthi, the Dewan of Mysore. On July 26 he gave another

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lecture at Sri Malleswaram Swami's temple on "What is yoga ?", Chief Justice Dewan Bahadur A. Ramachandra Iyer presiding. His lecture on 'The Vedanta at the Mayo Hall on July 29, was presided over by V. P Madhava·Rao, senior councillor of the Mysore state council. On July 30 there was a lecture by him on 'Bhakti Yoga' in Hindi at the Anantappavaru Math in the city. On July 31 his lecture on the "Common goal of all Religions" at the Mayo Hall was presided over by H. V Nanjundiah, ex-secretary to the Mysore Government. C. Srinivasa Iyengar, councillor to the state presided on August 2 over his lecture on "Lessons from Ramayana (Social, political and spiritual)" at the Sanskrit College under the auspices of the 'Arya Dharma Bodhini Sabha.' On the same day the Swami gave a short address on 'Bhakti' at the Anna Vasanti Sangham, Cantonment. He delivered another speech on that day on the 'Conception of Iswara' under the auspices of the Basavangudi Union at the Bull Temple, Subbaroya Iyer, District and Sessions Judge, presiding. He spoke on 'Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda' at Poornaya's Chhatram in the city in the morning of August 3 and in the evening at the same place on the 'Necessity of Religion' with P. N. Purnaiya, excise commisioner in the chair. On August 4, he lectured on the 'Ideals of Life' under the auspices of the Ranade Memorial Society and Friends Union at the London Mission School, councillor C. Srinivasa Iyer presiding.

Vide, "*Mysore and the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement*" published from Bangalore at the time of Sri Ramakrishna Centinary.

[2] See his article in the *Vedanta Kesari*, July, 1922.

raised by the force of the Swami's personality and teachings, which left an indelible impress upon the place and established the Dharma once again on broad and unsectarian, yet deep and abiding lines."

In October of the same year the Swami visited Mysore again at the invitation of the Vedanta Society and delivered a series of five lectures[3] there. A noteworthy address in this series was his Sanskrit speech given before the pundits of the place, in the local Sanskrit College. In this address he tried to reconcile the three schools of Vedanta in the light of the spiritual experiences and teachings of his Master. Though this speech was quite learned and thought-provoking the orthodox pundits hardly realised its import and courteously refrained from contesting its conclusions.

The interest that was created in Bangalore by the lectures of the Swami was to some extent kept alive by the Vedanta Society. In the middle of August, 1904, the Swami was again invited there to found a permanent centre, and this time he went with Swami Atmananda. During his short stay he delivered three[4] interesting lectures on (1) What to Follow? (2) Was Christ a Vedantin? (3) Is Vedanta atheistic or theistic? This time the Swami inaugurated religions classes at the Government Girls High School, Mudaliars Bungalow and the Vivekananda Ashrama and left Swami Atmananda in charge of them to continue the work. Swami Atmananda and in his absence Swamis Vimalananda and Bodhananda conducted the work till 1906 under the guidance of Swami Ramakrishnananda.

In the middle of June 1906 Swami Abhedananda landed at Colombo from America where he had been preaching Vedanta for about a decade. Swami Ramakrishnananda, accompained by Swami Paramananda went to Colombo from Madras to recieve him. From Colombo the Swamis visited Kandy, Anuradhapura and Jaffna. At all these places they were given warm receptions by the local people. From Ceylon they left for India and stopping at several places on the way reached Madras in the middle of July. In the following month Swami Ramakrishnananda again visited Bangalore and Mysore with Swami Abhedananda. The two Swamis together delivered several lectures and consolidated the Vedanta work in the State. Swami Ramakrishnananda was anxious to secure a suitable site for housing the Ashrama. V. P. Madhava Rao, Dewan of the State donated to the mission about two acres of land in the Basavangudi quarter of Bangalore City and Swami Abhedananda laid the foundation-stone of the present Ashrama building. When this large plot of land was procured for the Ashrama Swami Ramakrishnananda considered seriously the advisability of going there to collect the necessary funds for the building of the monastery. He expressed his mind to Sister Devamata who was then at Madras and suggested to her to accompany him to Bangalore. Being an American, the Sister at first shrank a little from the idea of begging for money from door to door. But the Swami explained to her that begging for a noble cause was a test for the absence of egotism in one. The Sister agreed and proceeded to Bangalore in advance. As soon as the Swami had returned from Tinnevelly, where he had gone to lecture before a religious convention, he also left for Bangalore. The Swami and the Sister began their begging regularly and did it for several hours every day.

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[3] On 4th October he lectured on the 'Message of Sri Ramakrishna' in the Rangacharlu Memorial Hall, on fifth on 'The Common Goal of Religions' on 6th on 'The Duties of Modern Hindus', on 7th on 'Yoga,' each in the same hall; on 8th a sanskrit address at the Sanskrit College and on 10th on 'Vedanta' in Seringapatam.

[4] The first lecture on August 17 at the C.V.S. Sabha School, the second on the 18th at the Mayo Hall and the last on 19th at the Thodadappa's Chhatram near the City Railway Station.

Nearly always it met with friendly and generous response but occasionally there were also rebuffs. One such rebuff came from a high official of the Mysore Government. The Swami along with the Sister had gone to the house of the Government servant and waited for nearly two hours to see him. When he came out the Sister explained their errand and made the usual appeal. Suddenly he cut her short and remarked, " I cannot understand why they make so much of this Ramakrishna ". The Sister was silenced, and there seemed nothing more for her to do. But the Swami turned to him with glowing smile and said, " Let me tell you of Sri Ramakrishna. I was his personal servant." Then the Swami began to talk of his Master with such fervour that the gentleman's interest was roused. For half an hour he listened with growing attention, then excused himself and left the verandah. When he returned he brought in his hands a contribution to the building funds of the monastery.

The prime minister of Mysore State showed the keenest interest in the construction of the monastery building and was eager to help the Swami in every way. He got the ground of the Ashrama site cleared with his own coolies and had the plan drawn by the state architect. A foundation stone had been laid sometime before but the position of the ground was not considered satisfactory. So a new site was chosen, the brush wood on it was cut down, measurements were taken and everything was made ready. One morning the Dewan came there with his whole staff and many notable officials according to the previous arrangement. He handed to Sister Devamata a wooden mallet and asked her to drive the first stake to mark the foundation, which she did. The space for the building was then lined off and Swami Ramakrishnananda chanted some verses from the scriptures. The morning ceremony ended with the laying of the new foundation of the building.

The Swami was impatient to start the work of construction soon. He continued his begging for more than a month until a sufficient amount was collected and the construction was begun. The Ashrama at Bangalore at that time was in charge of Swami Atmananda. In spite of the daily round of begging which occupied several hours the Swami went on with his usual routine at the bungalow where he put up with the Sister. He continued to prepare vegetables for the curry and gave the Sister the privilege of looking after the shrine. Every afternoon without fail he used to bring from the garden two handfuls of jasmine flowers and requested the Sister to string a garland to be offered at the evening service. It seemed to give him boundless joy to pick these fragrant blossoms for his Master. Visitors came in large numbers and the Swami had to talk with them long on religious matters. "Swami Ramakrishnananda" observes Sister Devamata, "was deeply revered and loved in Bangalore and many sought him out to have spiritual instruction from him. At times the hall was so full that it was like a class." On May 26th. 1908, he delivered a lecture before a large gathering on 'The Ideals of Life', V. P. Madhava Rao presiding. But soon after this it became necessary for the Swami to return to Madras. Meanwhile the monastery building construction was in progress. It was completed in the beginning of 1909, and its opening ceremony was performed on 20th. January of the same year.

Swami Brahmananda, the then president of the Ramakrishna Order, had come to the South a few months before and was requested by Swami Ramakrishnananda to open the new monastery at Bangalore. Accordingly the two Swamis together with others arrived from Madras at Bangalore station and were received on the platform by M. A. Narayana Iyengar, Asst. Commisioner of the state, who was the central figure of the orgnisation at Bangalore. The Swamis drove from the station immediately to the new monastery. Several tents had been put up on the grounds of the newly built monastery for the opening ceremony. A huge pandal, decorated and supported with ornamental poles was erected before the new building. Poles with pennants lined the driveway. All the tents and decorations were lent by the state. The pandal which could accomodate an audience of at least twelve hundred people was overcrowded and many stood outside. Precisely at 8 A.M. the Dewan with his staff and a number of important officials arrived. Sister Devamata and many others marched in procession to the front verandah which was to serve as platform, and the dedication ceremonies began. The Dewan read an address of welcome to Swami Brahmananda on behalf of the Bangalore public. This was followed by a speech by K. P. Puttanna Chetty, who in his address pointed out how His Highness the late lamented Chamarajendra Wodeyer Bahadur and his distinguished minister, Sir K. Seshadri Iyer, appreciated the masterful abilities and spiritual power of Swami Vivekananda. He added, "The Maharaja even took down a phonograph record of the Swamiji's voice and helped to send him to America. When later the Swami captivated and conquered the mind of the West by his message, Bangalore was among the first to thank him in public for his invaluable services. Later on the valuable work of his colleagues, Swami Ramakrishnananda and others in Bangalore is so very fresh as to need no stretch of memory to recall." In reply to the addresses, Swami Brahmananda made a short speech and concluded with these words, "I now call upon my beloved brother Swami Ramakrishnananda to explain to you more fully the objects of this mission."[5]

In quite a long lucid lecture Swami Ramakrishnananda spoke in his usual drive-home way on the greatness and uniqueness of the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, for the propagation of whose gospel and the working out of whose mission this math was being established. He said that Sri Ramakrishna had come to revive the fallen religions of the world, to give them back their own vitality, which seemed to have waned in the course of time. He came to re-install man on the secure basis of his divine heritage from which he had shifted his centre of existence and so had erred. He taught that man was divine by birth-right and so to call him a sinner was the worst lie. Thus Sri Ramakrishna was the fulfilment of the divine promise reiterated in our scriptures that when religion declined and man erred, God must come to uphold religion and show man the way. The unique discovery of his life was that all the religions, which were but different paths, lead to the same goal—God. So all quarrels over religion were unnecessary, silly and ridiculous. The duty of a man, however, was to go by the path of the religion in which he is born, and go headlong towards the end, i.e., God, for He is the ultimate and the only Reality and all else are unreal. And as God is the very core and quintessence of man's existence, it is possible for man to know, see and realize Him. The Swami concluded with the words, "You have given us a home and we shall work here and teach the precepts of the divine Master under this roof."

Sister Devamata then rose and made a short speech. After the conclusion of her address, which was the last, the opening ceremony commenced.[6] Dewan Saheb handed over the keys to Swami Brahmananda who unlocked the door of the new monastery and entered. All those who were on the verandah made a tour of the building and returned to the central room which had been converted temporarily into a chapel. Here the real consecration service conducted by Swami Ramakrishnananda was held. A fire was lighted as a symbol of purification and the blessings of the Lord were fervently invoked by prayer and supplication. At the close a group of Brahmins chanted passages from the Vedic scriptures. As they came to the end of each verse, they threw a handful of rose petals on the altar. When they had finished, the pile of fragrant petals almost hid the sacred picture behind it. Distribution of flowers and *prasad* brought the proceedings to a close. Swamis Brahmananda, Ramakrishnananda, Atmananda and several younger Swamis took up their immediate residence in the new monastery. The opening ceremony was held on the 20th January and on the 24th, the anniversary of Swami Vivekananda was celebrated on a grand scale in the new monastery. On the morning of the celebration-day a long procession was led by Swami Ramakrishnananda through the main streets of the City. Soon after the celebration the Swami opened a class which met every evening after the evening service and life fell into a quieter routine.

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[5] Vide the *Prabuddha Bharata*, March, 1909.

Thus the Ashrama founded in 1904 at Bangalore was established in its permanent site and building in 1909 by Swami Ramakrishnananda, who used to visit Bangalore many a time. His last visit was towards to the end of 1910 for the recuperation of his health as he was then attacked seriously with diabetes and consumption.

It was through the earnest solicitations of Swami Ramakrishnananda that the Holy Mother with a party of eight went to South India on pilgrimage in February 1910. After visiting Madras, Madura and Ramnad the party went to Bangalore and were accommodated in the local monastery. When she alighted from the train and passed through the streets people showered so many flowers on her that they fell in heaps on the road. Swami Ramakrishnananda himself attended to all the physical needs and comforts of the Holy Mother. As long as she was there, he never failed to pluck some fresh and fragrant flowers from the garden every morning and to offer them at her feet. He was often found to make respectful prostrations to her and pray earnestly for her blessings. One evening the Holy Mother retired to a hillock just behind the monastery in the company of some monastic disciples and sat there enjoying the beautiful sunset. While watching the sublime scenery of variegated colours reflected by the setting sun through the patches of clouds floating about in the sky she passed into profound meditation. Swami Ramakrishnananda, who then happened to be present there, knelt down before her with folded hands and tearful eyes and humbly prayed, "Oh Mother, Thou art the Divine Mother who resides in all beings as power and opens the gate of salvation. Bless me and thy other children who have taken shelter at thy feet so that we may be liberated from the bondages of the world." The Holy mother opened her compassionate eyes, graciously placed her hand on his head and blessed him. This gave him infinite solace and comfort.

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[6] For further details of the ceremony and Swami Ramakrishnananda's untiring efforts to establish the ashrama and build the monastery, see Sister Devamata's *Days in an Indian Monastery* pp. 128-144.

The uphill task of a pioneer to found and stabilise the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement in Bangalore was successfully carried through by the promethean labours of Swami Ramakrishnananda. In 1925, an Ashrama was started in Mysore City where Swami Ramakrishnananda had gone in October, 1903, and put in the ground work. Both the Ashramas in the State were established during the reign of its pious Maharaja, His Highness the late Krishnaraja Wodoyar IV, and received his patronage in abundance.

The movement has made great headway in the State and many books have been published in Kanarese, the Language of the State and its environs. A few of these books have been published by the Mysore University and prescribed as text-books in the schools and colleges of the State.

CHAPTER VIII

PREACHING IN CITIES AND TOWNS

I

THE Ramakrishna Movement is now spread throughout the length and breadth of Travancore. Not only at Trivandrum, the capital of the State, but also in other towns and villages, there is a network of Ashramas named after Sri Ramakrishna. This is the result of the work of a number of disciples of the Master. Firstly Kalipada Ghosh, a lay disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, went to Travancore as a tourist about the end of 1886. His private talks with some local gentlemen on the Saint made a favourable impression. A few years later he went to Trivandrum as the local agent of Messers John Dickinson & Co., who had taken up contract for the supply of stationery and other sundry articles to the Travancore Palace. In the course of a few years he became a well-known personage in the state.

Secondly, Swami Vivekananda, while wandering as an unknown monk, visited Travancore in December 1892, stayed a few days with Professor Sundararama Iyer and left a profound impression on all persons who met him. When news of Swami Vivekananda's success at the Parliament of Religions, Chicago, was published in the papers, Prof. Iyer felt sure that Swami Vivekananda was certainly the same monk who had stayed with him. Thirdly, some time after, Swami Niranjanananda, another disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, passed through Trivandrum on his way to Cape Comorin, and spent some days in a celebrated hill retreat in South Travancore.

Then in 1904 Swami Ramakrishnananda visited Trivandrum as the guest of Sri Kalipada Ghosh mentioned above. The Swami stayed there for a month, held regular classes on the Gita in a small building in the heart of the city, and delivered four public lectures. One of the lectures was given in the Town Hall and its subject was

'Bhakti.' Another was given in the Padmavilasam Palace, the town residence of the Dewan, and was presided over by Dewan Krishnaswami Row. The classes and lectures were well attended, and roused genuine interest in the minds of the educated people to understand our religion in the light of the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. During his stay the Swami made the acquaintance of the leading Hindu officials of the State and the notable citizens of Trivandrum. A large number of persons interested in religion came to see the Swami and held long talks with him on religious matters. To some eager aspirants he also gave spiritual instructions. Among them, one, Vedadrisadara Mudaliar, an old judge, was a frequent visitor. The Swami was anxious to open a permanent centre of work there at once and promised to send a monk to look after it. From Trivandrum the Swami went to Cape Comorin for worshipping the Goddess there, and on the way accepted the hospitality of K. Padmanabhan Thampy.[1] The devout host had made orthodox arrangements for his food. On hearing of this the Swami said, 'You will have the honour of having Guru Maharaj as your guest.' and offered the cooked food to Sri Ramakrishna, and partook of the prasad. Next day the host meditated on the spot sanctified by the Swami's sitting and worshipping, and was pleased to find that there his 'mind rose with ease to a state of intense calmness.'[2] As a result of the Swami's Gita classes, a small Vedanta Society came into existence at Trivandrum soon after his departure due to the enthusiasm of a group who took practical interest in religion. Matters went on like this till 1912, when another Swami went there and gave further impetus to the young Society. Slowly the Society worked on, till in 1924 an Ashrama was established at Nettayam, 5 miles from the city on a hill overlooking the sea and the beautiful town of Trivandrum. This Ashrama which is now the most important centre of the Mission in Travancore attracts large numbers of devotees and friends from all parts of the State, conducts a Malayalam monthly named *Prabuddha Keralam*, and publishes Malayalam translations of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature to mention a few of its many sided activities.

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[1] See his article in the *Vedanta Kesari* for July 1922.

[2] See his article 'Swami Ramakrishnananda: The Movement in Travancore' in *Vedanta Kesari* 1922, July. pp. 105.

II

Invited on the occasion of the third anniversary of the Brahmanishta Math at Narasimhanellur near Tinnevelly, Swami Ramakrishnananda left Madras on the 24th December, 1904 and reached Tinnevelly the next morning. A grand reception was given him at the railway station, and he was taken to the Math in great pomp. On reaching the Math he delivered his opening address. He stayed there till the 28th and gave three lectures on (1) What is Hinduism? (2) The nature of the Soul and (3) Bhakti. At the earnest request of the citizens he came to the city on the 29th and spoke on 'Image Worship' in the Vasanta Mandapam attached to the biggest temple in Tinnevelly. The lecture was attended by about three thousand people who displayed great interest in the Swami. After the lecture was over. the Swami entered the temple followed by crowds of people shouting 'Namah Parvatipataye,' 'Hara Hara Mahadeva!' The Swami wanted to leave for Madras on the following day, but the enthusiasm of the people compelled him to put off his departure till the day after, and on the 30th December he lectured on 'Parabhakti.' The gathering was so large for the lecture that police arrangements had to be made to maintain order. As a good many of the listeners were ignorant of English, a local monk had to interpret it in Tamil. The Swami made so profound an impression on the people that many were deeply moved. He left Tinnevelly on 31st December and reached Madras the following morning.[3]

III

When Swami Ramakrishnananda came to the Belur Math in 1904, he spoke to the students of the Calcutta Metropolitan Institute of which he was a student. He visited Sholapur on his way back to Madras from Calcutta on the 19th July of that year. He delivered, at the 'Sangit Theatre' on Thursday the 21st July, a lecture on 'Universal Religion' which was highly appreciated by the local public. Very lucidly the Swami sketched the lives of Jesus Christ, Mohammed and Buddha and showed with great cogency how the aims and objects of the religions founded by them were the same. He pointed out that all religions were but honest attempts of different types of people to realise the supreme Self; and concluded by advising the audience not to quarrel with any religion, however apparently contradictory to their own but to sincerely practise the religion they were born in. The Swami delivered another lecture at the Ripon Hall on the 28th on 'Happiness' and showed very clearly that real happiness could not be had from anything changeful or '*Asat*'; that, in fact. the true knowledge of the Self was the only means to real happiness. The audience of more than 300 heard the inspiring lecture with deep attention for more than an hour and a half. At the request of the public the Swami agreed to give another speech in the same Hall on the evening of Sunday the 31st on 'The Message of Swami Vivekananda'.[4] The Swami held conversations also every morning and evening till he left for Madras on the 1st week of August.

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[3] Vide *Prabuddha Bharata*, March, 1905.

IV

The Hindu community of Masulipatam founded a temple on an unsectarian basis and gave it the name of *Vivekananda Mandira* in memory of the illustrious Swami under whose inspiration they had been working in the cause of the *Sanatana Dharma*. Instead of an image, they set up in this temple '*Om*' which is regarded by Hindus of all sects with great veneration as the common symbol of their eternal faith. The Mandira was opened on the 27th August, 1904 by Swami Ramakrishnananda who was specially invited for this purpose. The Swami also delivered two lectures there on 'How to realise the Truth?' And on his way back he gave a lecture at Bezwada on 'Sri Ramakrishna and his teachings.'[5]

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[4] Vide *Brahmavadin*, August, 1904.

V

Invited by the Sanatana Dharma Vidyalala, Swami Ramakrishnananda proceeded to Alleppey in Travancore on the 18th of January, 1905, to open the institution. He delivered a lecture on *Sanatana Dharma* on the same evening and another on Gita on the following day. An Ashrama of the Ramakrishna Mission was started there two decades later though the seed was sown by him long ago. It has succeeded in arousing the interest of the fishermen community of a neighbouring village in the lives and teaching of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

V1

On his way back from Alleppey, the Swami visited the native state of Cochin where he was presented with an address by the local Theosophical Society. In the course of the address[6] the Society observed that the Swami stood for such a mighty movement of good, for so much that had made for the regeneration and reinvigoration of the failing spirit of this country that they who wished to love this land with all its traditions and memories, who wished that this country should once again take its place among the nations as the standard-bearer of light, widsom and righteousness, felt they could not pass by this occasion when he had appeared in their midst, without marking, in however poor and inferior a degree, the sense of the gratitude they felt towards the mighty school of ascetics that he represented.

The Society also pertinently pointed out that time was when the great institution of *sannyasa* was understood in its truest and highest sense as the grandest possible life of renunciation and service that could be conceived by the human mind; but in the dark age it had degraded and degenerated and lay heavy on the motherland, well nigh choking the life out of it, and now that the holy order of the Blessed Bhagawan Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and Swami Vivekananda had come into existence and had been doing its glorious work, not in India alone but in various parts of the world, the stain upon their national character had been removed and the greatness and significance of the ancient royal Dharma of sannyasa had once again been vindicated with unparalelled splendour.

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[5] Vide *Prabuddha Bharata*, October, 1904.

[6] Full text of the address appeared in the *Brahmavadin* for February 1905.

On the 20th January the Swami gave a lecture on the *Chaturvidha Purushartha* (four-fold end of human life) at the premises of the Theosophical Society. At Ernakulam he delivered a lecture on 'Death and After' and on the 21st another on 'Bhakti' at the local college premises. He left Ernakulam on the 22nd morning and reached Madras on the following day.

VII

Swami Ramakrishnananda visited Pudukottah and stayed there from the 24th to the 28th April, 1905 and delivered seven lectures.[7]

The Swami lodged during these five days in a quiet corner of the town near a tank. People of all sorts resorted to him to pay him homage and to hear him discourse on religious topics. Orthodox pundits also came to him frequently and felt themselves blessed to have seen him. The Swami had many earnest students who went to him to have their doubts cleared, and he treated them all with uniform kindness.

A few of his utterances in conversation were very interesting and instructive. He would say "Words are mere flowers; but deeds are fruits," and he often drew attention to the fact that religion was nothing if it was not regularly practised. He cautioned his listeners against presuming to learn the highest secrets of religion through a mere satisfaction of intellectual curiosity without a sincere yearning for light. Only he who had realised that this earthly existence of ours was darkness and misery could have such a real yearning. Hence the necessity of the *Sadhana Chatushtayam* or the four aids, of which the chief was *mumukshatwam*, the desire for salvation. One who harboured the least desire to remain in the world could not be eager for salvation; and if such a one betrayed a hankering for eternal wisdom, it was out of mere intellectual curiosity. He would not have the inclination to practise religion immediately on learning of it, nor would he have a real enlightenment. His interest in religion would end in mere glib talk. He would delude himself into the wrong notion that with all his sins he was divine and would neglect his duties and even commit atrocious crimes. So it was better to be modest in our pretensions about the study of Vedanta. Man *minus* his sins and ignorance might be Brahman; but not *with* his sins and ignorance. In his opinion, that was why the Vedanta was odious in the eyes of Christian Missionaries. At the same time the Swami referred to the necessity of keeping the Vedanta a secret from unqualified aspirants and justified the law of competent discipleship. The Swami showed in various other instances how the sacred law of the ancient sages was based on reason and the facts of human nature. He dissuaded his hearers from unnecessarily and blindly imitating European customs; for he said, "Imitation is death." In religion he advised us to prefer Bhakti to Jnana; for, while the Jnani had to go about in search of God by his own unaided power, the Bhakta had only to love God, and God, conquered by his love, would appear of His own accord to the Bhakta. Generally he exhorted people to love and serve God rather than to tread the path of Jnana.

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[7] Vide *Brahmavadin*, May, 1905.

In the lecture on the 'Necessity of Religion,' the Swami showed how man in his search for happiness first adopts the moral law out of mere prudence; since, each man being the mirror of all the others, evil done to one inevitably recoils back on the doer, and how after a time he finds that even this moral law is insufficient. The problem of death and of the vanity of earthly pleasures forces itself at last on him, and he realises his utter inability to find true happiness in the world of the senses. Then Religion dawns on man and persuades him to analyse Nature and his self for the discovery of perfect happiness. He tries to transcend the senses either by knowledge of the self or by intense love of God, and thus he discovers the substratum, the Life of all life.

In his second lecture, the Swami showed that man, naturally impelled to work, soon learns that there is a higher power that moulds his destinies and grants him good and evil according to his merits and demerits; and to deserve well of that power, he worships it in various forms for the sake of worldly prosperity. Even then perfect happiness is not achieved, and finally man realises the vanity of earthly pleasures and the necessity of searching for eternal Bliss. The way thereto, he said, was to retrace our steps ; desire for the good was the cause of activity and activity would cease to produce bondage only if it is prompted not by desire but by desirelessness. Hence the Swami said, " Do your duty for God's sake ; know that all belongs to God, and you will reach freedom and wisdom in time. This is Karma Yoga."

In the third lecture, Swami Ramakrishnananda explained the scientific mode of rising from the false self to the Supreme Self which is the same as the Infinite Being. First one had to conquer the mind ; for otherwise, Raja Yoga was extremely dangerous. One who had divested himself of all impurity and all selfishness could in course of time by the practice of deep 'breathing, according to the Yogic Science, invariably attain a quiescent mind, the cessation of all mentations which means Samadhi, and thereby realise infinite Bliss. Thereafter the bonds of life and death, pleasure and pain would fall off, doubts would vanish and conciousness would retain for ever the bliss that arose in Samadhi.

In the fourth lecture, addressed to students, the Swami advised them to study not for wealth but for wisdom ; and for that purpose to have implicit faith in the teacher, to become, as it were, an instrument in his hands ; so that whatever the teacher wanted the pupil to know he would know at once by the power of love. Bad books encouraging filthy ideas were to be avoided. Books such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* were really useful. The body was to be strengthened, not with sumptuous meals, but by daily exercise and homely food. He said, " Eat to live." " *Sariramadyam khalu dharma sadhanam* ", 'the body was the first tool for the practice of virtue.' Religious rites according to particular customs of one's caste were not to be neglected on the false plea of 'No time to spare from studies.' For, out of religious practice come steadiness and purity of mind which best conduce to successful study. He exhorted the Brahmin students to recite the Veda with the proper intonation and to study Sanskrit.

In his fifth lecture, the Swami explained Sankara's Advaita philosophy. The Universe, apparently objective, was really subjective and as such did not exist. What existed was the One Infinite. One had but to eliminate the apparent entities, sense objects, the body, the mind and even the intellect, and what remained was the One. And by that elimination one lost all fear and misery and became the One without a Second. That elimination was possible only through a strong and purified will. The will had to be exerted to the utmost to compel the mind to stop its illusory creations of phenomena and to allow the Real to manifest itself.

In his sixth lecture, the Swami gave a short account of his Master, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. Not satisfied with the intellectual feast of philosophy, Sri Ramakrishna had refused to study the sacred Books, and had said that he would learn nothing but what directly showed him God. While he was a worshipper at the temple of Kali he became so absorbed in his passion for the vision of the Divine Mother that he had sometimes wept piteously and often went without food and sleep. At length his earnestness succeeded and he had a vision of Her; and thereafter She was present to him always and he saw Her even in the meanest beggar. He had then been filled with the idea of Her infinite love; and this had led him to think that religions other than his own could not be false; for, then the goodness of the Divine Mother would be finite which it could not be. So he had worked on to the realisation of God according to the cults of the Vaishnava, the Tantrika, the Vedantist, the Christian, and the Mohammedan and had reached the same goal through all of them. He had realised God by the practice of Raja Yoga too. In an extraordinarily earnest manner he had disciplined himself until he had conquered covetousness, sexual lust and pride of caste etc., completely. Thousands had resorted to him and found in him a practical demonstration of true religion. Even when he had been disabled by disease he had still gone on teaching the seekers and had at last lapsed peacefully into the arms of his loving Mother.

The seventh lecture was devoted to Bhakti. The Bhakta started with the idea that he was weak, finite, and compared with God a zero, and that God was infinitely powerful, and hence was able to save His Bhakta. The easiest means to approach God was Love. Absolute surrender of self to God was the Bhakta's ideal. All his emotions he directed Godward. As the Swami's Master had said, the object of the Bhakta's love was the Infinite Beauty of God; he was angry with himself for being lazy and indifferent to the Loveliness of God, and hated himself for his vices and frailties; he eagerly coveted the wealth of love of God; the Bliss of the Divine Presence infatuated him: he prided himself on being the child of God; and he envied the fortunate sages who had already been favoured by Him with His holy vision. Thus earnestly seeking God and God alone he divested himself of the ideas of 'I' and 'mine' which like a stick in a current caused a distinction between the soul and God; and finally he merged in the Blissful Being.

VIII

It has already been mentioned in this chapter that Kalipada Ghosh, a lay disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, was the host of Swami Ramakrishnananda at Trivandrum. Kalipada opened a branch of Messrs John Dickinson & Co., at Bombay and made his son the manager of the firm. A flat at Topiwala Chawl in Grant Road was hired for the residence of the employees of the firm and also other Bengalis. Some devotees installed a photo of the Master there and worshipped it on every Wednesday, the day of the week on which Sri Ramakrishna was born. When Swami Bodhananda, now the head of the Vedanta Society at New York, visited Bombay in December, 1904, he put up in that flat. He suggested to the Bengali devotees, who where holding the birthday anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna, to invite Swami Ramakrishnananda to the next celebration. S. S. Setlur the well-known advocate of the Bombay High Court, who had come in direct contact with Swami Vivekananda, took a prominent part in organising the function. Swami Ramakrishnananda whose name and fame had already reached Bombay from Madras, accepted their invitation. He had gone to Rangoon to take part in the celebrations in that city, and from there he came to Bombay, where he was received at the Victoria Terminus station by the local devotees headed by Setlur. He was garlanded on the platform and taken to the Topiwala Chawl where he was accommodated. After taking a little rest he enquired whether daily worship of Sri Ramakrishna was being done there. When he learnt that the Lord was being worshipped there on Wednesday evenings and given offerings he expressed a desire to do daily worship and make offerings during his short stay there and instructed the resident devotees to arrange for it. The Swami accordingly performed puja daily during the few days he stayed there. One eye-witness writes "It was a heavenly sight for even a man of little faith to witness with what deep devotion he offered worship. He seemed to be unconscious of his environment and his body glowed in keeping with the transformation that took place in his mind and soul." Sri Narottamdas Morarji, a prominent mill owner of the city was one of the many visitors who came daily to see him and talk to him. He took the Swami one day to show his mills to him and presented him with a few bundles of cloth manufactured there.

The Seventy-second anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated in Bombay on the first of April, 1905 at the Framji Cowsaji Hall under the presidentship of Sir Bhatchandra Krishna. The audience was fairly large and the chairman introducing Swami Ramakrishnananda gave a short account of the growing activities of the Mission in India and abroad. The Swami spoke for more than an hour, after which the president made fitting remarks on his speech. He delivered three more lectures[8] at Bombay on 'Bhakti Yoga,' 'Universal Religion' and 'Sri Ramakrishna's Teachings.' '*Indu Prakash*' and other local papers in English and Indian vernaculars published excellent summaries of his speeches. Bala Gangadhara Tilak who presided over one of his lectures appealed to the people of Bombay in general and the Swami in particular to start a centre of the Order at Bombay. He even wrote an article in *The Kesari* to that effect. In the presence of Swami Ramakrishnananda an influential committee was formed for this purpose with Sri Balachandra Krishna as president and Dr. Vaida as Secretary and some of the leading citizens and Bengalis as members. Tilak was requested to become the president of the committee but he declined on the ground that being a political worker his name on the committee might hamper the work of the religious institution. He however promised to lend a helping hand to the committee from outside. The lectures of Swami Ramakrishnananda stirred the people of Bombay and roused their religious enthusiasm. Every day visitors crowed to have a sight of and talk with the Swami, who continued his religious conversations late into the night. The Swami's visit to Bombay proved so successful that he sent a wire to Swami Brahamanada, the then President of the Mission, informing him of the good response from the people. Bombay now boasts of an influential Ramakrishna Ashrama whose ground-work was done by Swami Ramakrishnananda four decades ago.

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[8] Vide *Prabuddha Bharata* April 1905.

One day when he was at Bombay, the Swami told the local devotees that even the direct disciples could not fathom fully the greatness of the Master. He said, "Do you think it is we who are preaching his wonderful life and message? Far from it. The Master himself is doing it in mysterious ways. Wherever we go to preach him we find that the field s already prepared. Some are blessed in dream by him; some get spiritual initiation directly from him; some are attracted by the quality of his teachings which clothe the highest truth in simple language and parables; and some are inspired by seeing and hearing his disciples."

IX

The Ramakrishna Students' Home, Madras, which is now one of the best and largest educational institutions in South India, was founded by Swami Ramakrishnananda on the 17th February, 1905. The opening ceremony was performed by the Swami in the presence of a small gathering of friends and students. The proceedings began with worship according to the Agamic rites and the chanting of the Upanishads by the boarders. The Swami then declared the Home open, gave the boarders sound advice for perfecting their conduct in life and assured them that no anxiety need be felt about their progress now that they had come under the compassionate care of Sri Ramakrishna, the Divine Incarnation of the present age. He blessed the institution with long life and a prosperous career and predicted that the work being a labour of love was bound to succeed and that it would be a model institution for the building up of the character of young men while at the same time watching sedulously over their physical and intellectual development. The prediction of the Swami, it may be added, has been more than fulfiilled

At the end of the opening ceremony the Swami spoke a few words about the ideal of the Home to the following effect: "*Annadanam* is spoken of as *Mahadanam*, and is considered very sacred in our country. And *Vidyadanam* is greater. But the greatest is the conferring of the spiritual knowledge. The harmonising of all the three should be the aim of this institution. May Sri Ramakrishna bless the undertaking with success."

When the draft of the first annual report of the Home was shown to him for approval he added in his own words: "It had been named the Ramakrishna Students' Home in honour of the revered Saint Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, of whose intense love for the poor this institution is intended to be an humble memorial." Rao Sahib C. Ramaswamy Iyengar, the foremost organiser and the lifelong secretary of the Home, rightly observes, "The home which has grown up from a very small beginning to its present position of being one of the largest educational institutions of the Ramakrishna Mission owes its inception to Swami Ramakrishnananda. It was the living with the Swami that really moulded the life and ideals of the Home. From the start he took a deep personal interest in the boys and by holding classes and talks used to instil into their minds noble ideals of service and sacrifice. Though he had to hold classes in several parts of the city and was very busy with the various activities of the monastery he undertook to go to the Home almost every week to give religious instruction to the boys."

X

On the morning of the 22nd. November, 1908 Swami Brahmananda, the then president of the Ramakrishna Mission visited the Vivekananda Hindu Girls' School, Choolai Madras, on a special invitation, accompanied by Swami Ramakrishnananda. An interesting programme was gone through by the students and then Swami Ramakrishnananda spoke a few words. He admonished all present to prove worthy of the blessings of Swami Brahmananda, by manifesting in their lives the ideals preached by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda[9].

XI

Once Swami Ramakrishnananda went to Tinnevelly to deliver lectures for a week under the auspices of the local 'Sadhu Sanga Sabha' on the banks of the holy Tambraparni river. He gave there a number of speeches in English and a youth translated them into Tamil. On another occasion he went to Conjeevaram to give speeches at the time of the *Garuda Utsava* celebrations. Wherever he preached people were inspired and institutions sprang up.

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[9] Vide *Prabuddha Bharata*, December 1906.

CHAPTER IX

THE SWAMI IN BURMA

WHEN Akshaya Kumar Sen, a lay disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and the author of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi*[1], was at Rangoon in 1900 the 'Ramakrishna Sevaka Samiti' was formed there by the local Bengali devotees. This Samiti celebrated the anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna with great enthusiasm every year in that city. In 1905 Swami Ramakrishnananda was invited by this Samiti to grace the celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversary held there on 20th March of that year. Sailing from Madras on the 16th March the Swami reached Rangoon on the 20th. and stayed there as the guest of Rai Saheb Nibaran Chandra Banerjee, an engineer in the Burma Government. The Swami was the first apostle of the Order to carry the message of Sri Ramakrishna to that Buddhist country across the Bay of Bengal. On arrival he was given a warm reception and presented with an address of welcome by the Samiti. The function was largely attended by the Burmese elite and the leading Indians of the city.

In the address[2] the Samiti dwelt upon the close connection spiritual and otherwise, between India and Burma that dated back to the remote past and said that it was their ancestors who had carried the pure light of Buddhism across the seas to that country and that it was a matter of legitimate pride and much gratification to them that even in these days of national degeneration, one of their own countrymen should again, after the lapse of so many centuries, come to this beautiful land of the Pagodas on a religious mission.

The Samiti also observed that they were proud to feel that he was one whom they could call their own; for in him they found the ancient ideal of renunciation on the one hand and on the other, a life of strenuous work for the welfare of fellow men revived and typified; and that in his work they caught a faint glimpse of the distant future which would see the realisation of the glorious work that his illustrious co-adjutor, the late lamented Swami Vivekananda began, namely the establishment of a mighty religious organisation based on that genuine Hinduism which had just begun to be appreciated all over the world, through the remarkable zeal and ability of preachers like Vivekananda, himself and others, and embracing within its capacious bosom the whole Hindu race such as that perhaps which the great Sankaracharya himself conceived, attempted and nearly accomplished about twelve centuries ago.

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[1] A popular Bengali work in verse on Sri Ramakrishna's life published by the Udbodhan Office, Calcutta.

[2] For full text see the *Brahmavadin* for March 1905.

The society feelingly pointed out that his name, his fame, his life and his work served to keep green in their minds the fragrant memory of that Holy Saint and seer the great Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and of his life and teachings.

During his stay there for five days the Swami held religious conversaziones daily and delivered, besides the speech at the celebration, four more speeches on (i) What is Soul? (ii) The Vedas and the Vedanta (iii) Bhakti or Divine Love and (iv) Comparative Study of Religions. The second lecture was given at the Victoria Hall and was presided over by V. N. Sivaya, M. A., B. L. The third lecture was delivered at the Hindu Social Club with S. C. Dutta, M. A., B. L., in the chair and the last at the Theosophical Society under the presidentship of B. Cowasjee, the then leading Barrister of the Rangoon Bar. Distribution of Prasad among those assembled and the feeding of about 300 poor people formed part of the celebration.[3] A pandal was specially erected for this purpose in front of the house where the Swami stayed, which was near the present High Court Buildings. In the pandal, big pictures of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda were placed on a throne and tastefully decorated with flowers and foliage gathered from the Government House gardens. Large quantities of rice, dal and vegetables etc., were collected on the eve of the poor-feeding day. At the sight of the food-stuff an ultra-modern youth remarked, "I have no sympathy with beggars. Begging has become a fashionable profession with them. Many of them have good savings accounts." At this Swami Ramakrishnananda smiled and said[4] "Call these poor sufferers not beggars but the poor Narayanas or the hungry Narayanas, as they were called by Swami Vivekananda. Hindu, Mussalman, Buddhist or any other communal name should not be applied to them. Serve them with equal sympathy irrespective of distinctions of creed. Thank your stars that you have got the opportunity to serve them. Do not hate them, for we are not less needy in other respects than they are. See, how little they are satisfied with!"

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[3] Vide *Prabuddha Bharata*, April 1905 and *Brahmavadin* March 1905.

On the appointed day of the celebration, all workers of the Samiti got up early in the morning at the instance of the Swami and after bath became busy in the shrine with their allotted duties. The Swami himself in the company of Nibaran Chandra Banerjee, and Girindra Nath Sarkar, walked some two to three miles to the garden of Rai Bahadur Ramadas Bhattacharya to collect flowers named *Nageswara Champa* which were very much liked by Sri Ramakrishna. On the way Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, the famous Bengali Novelist, then an unknown employee, joined them, and an interesting conversation[5] ensued between the Swami and Sarat Chandra. Understanding that the Swami was taking so much trouble to gather a particular flower for worship, Sarat Chandra who was then an ultra-modern agnostic youth asked the Swami, 'Why do you worship so much?'

The Swami: Because I derive immense delight from it.

Sarat Chandra: Is ritual worship then the highest form of adoration to God?

The Swami: To See God everywhere is the highest worship; meditation is the next best; prayer and repetition of the Divine Names are lower than that; and external worship is the lowest.

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[4] Vide *Prabuddha Bharata*, April 1905 and *Brahmavadin*, March 1905.

[5] Vide the Bengali book, (now out of print) *Brahmadeshe Sarat Chandra* (Sarat Chandra in Burma) by Girindranath Sarkar, a devotee of Ramakrishna, and an eyes witness of the scene.

Sarat Chandra: Why do people display so much pomp during worship?

The Swami: Worship is not at all an external affair. It is almost wholly internal. Ordinary people perform worship either to escape from the displeasure of God or in expectation of fulfilling some desires. All these are low motives. Real worship is not done till devotion overflows the heart and tears roll down from the eyes for a glimpse of God. Worship, austerity and repetition of the Name performed by the worldly-minded are no sooner done than forgotten. Afterwards they do not remember God in the hurry and scurry of life. A true devotee takes God's name with every breath, is filled with sincere devotion and offers flowers, leaves and water to God without any selfish motive, saying, " O Mother Divine, worship and prayer are nothing but opportune moments to call on you."

The Swami and the party then reached the garden and saw therein a large *Nageswara* tree covered with fragrant flowers. The sweet scent of those beautiful blossoms had perfumed the morning breeze of the garden. The flowers looked like big white roses, and were exquisitely beautiful as though the heavens shone on them. The Burmese gardener went up the tree and plucked for the Swami small branches full of flowers. But the Swami was not satisfied with these alone. He took a bamboo pole and with it plucked some more flowers. Holding in hand those fragrant blossoms dear to his Lord the Swami was delighted beyond measure. That he could collect such rare flowers in plenty for the worship of the Lord in such a distant place as Rangoon overjoyed him. Highly pleased, he offered a few annas to the gardener and learnt from him that the Burmese name of the flower was *Gung*. It was strange that Lord Buddha also was extremely fond of those flowers. On returning to the pandal, the Swami saw that the gardener of the Government House had brought a basketful of selected roses at the instruction of his host. He was very glad to have them and exclaimed in joy " Glory to Ramakrishna ". The Swami decorated the portrait of Sri Ramakrishna with various flowers and garlands with his own hands. On the celebration day he was in such a joyous mood that even the newcomers after a talk with him became permanent friends and were drawn to Sri Ramakrishna

A suburban party came and continued *Sankirtana* throughout the day. The Swami himself performed the puja and *aratrikam* and made offerings to the Lord. At the time of the *aratrikam*, *mridanga*, bell, cymbals, Burmese gong etc., were played in unison. During the puja and *aratrikam* the Swami was so inspired that a living presence of the Divine was felt by all present. The devotees unanimously remarked that they had never witnessed such puja or *aratrikam* before. At the end of the *aratrikam*, cries of 'Jai Ramakrishna' filled the pandal and the surrounding place. Shortly after noon the Swami took prasad in the company of about a hundred devotees who had come to attend the celebration from different parts of Burma. When the celebration were over, the people dispersed shouting 'Jai Bhagavan Ramakrishna', 'Jai Swami Ramakrishnanandaji'.

During his short stay the Swami visited the notable objects of Rangoon. On a moonlit night he went to see the Shwedagon[6] Pagoda situated in a suburb of the city. It is one of the greatest wonders of the Buddhist world. The sky-kissing golden pagoda stands on a small hillock and enshrines the sacred hair and bones of the Enlightened One. One has to mount a hundred steps to go to the main temple which is 370 feet high and gold-plated on the top. Fifty thousand people can be accommodated in its precincts and nearly two lacs of rupees are needed to repair it once. The Swami circumambulated the temple with great devotion, enjoyed the heavenly scenery all around and was charmed with the fascinating beauty of the pagoda as it lay shimmering in the silvery light of the moon. He then prostrated himself before a huge image of the Buddha in meditative posture and sat down in *Padmasana* with closed eyes for a long meditation. His serene and graceful face attracted the attention of the pilgrims passing by. His countenance, like that of an angle, beamed with celestial lustre. He was so deeply lost in meditation that he was not aware when some Burmese women pilgrims offered several handfuls of flowers at his feet. After meditation he was surprised to see the flowers at his feet, and enquired about them. The care-taker trustee of the Pagoda, an octogenarian explained to him in English, saying, " Seeing you so full of reverance for Lord Buddha some pious Burmese women, out of spontaneous respect for you, have presented these flowers which they had brought for offering to the Lord Himself ". The Swami spoke to the trustee on Buddhism and its worldwide following. The old man showed the Swami the large bell, the second largest in the world,[7] hanging on the eastern side of the pagoda. The Swami was highly delighted to see the bell which is fourteen feet in height and about 95,000 pounds in weight. It is so capacious that six persons can stand side by side within it. He also pointed out to the Swami the rare, oval ruby on the temple. This ruby is worth three lacs of rupees and emits a bright light. On dark nights it looks like a distant star. Mindun Min, a king of free Burma, it is told, secured this costly ruby from the world famous Mogak Ruby mine during his reign. When the Swami was coming out of the temple an Irish Phungi[8] accosted him. It appeared that the Irishman, originally a Christian, had, after studying Buddhism, been attracted to it and had finally entered the Order. As a Buddhist preacher he was known all over Burma. With his yellow robe, bare feet and shaven head he preached Buddhism to the English-knowing Burmese. He lived very near the famous Shwedagon Pagoda and visited it daily. It was during his usual visit that he happened to meet Swami Ramakrishnananda that day. After preliminary greetings the Irish Buddhist monk invited the Swami to visit his hermitage. The Swami very gladly accepted his invitation and requested him to attend his lecture on the following evening in the Victoria Hall. The hall was packed to overflowing with a cultured audience. The Swami, who was garlanded amidst cheers at the commencement of the meeting, lectured for about two hours eloquently on the philosophy and religion of the Vedas. The speaker dwelt on the identity of the individual and the universal souls, and quoted relevant passages from the Upanishads, in substantiation of his statements. The lecturer was so interesting and inspiring and fluent that the audience sat spell-bound and speechless for a long time. The Irish monk met the Swami after the lecture and said, "I have heard all about you from my friend Sarat Chandra Chatterjee; but your learned lecture this evening has charmed me more than ever." The Swami like a child smiled at this remark, put his own garland on the neck of the Irish monk and promised to visit his hermitage the next day. He was then taken by the devotees in a carriage to the famous Royal Lake of Rangoon for an airing. The natural scenery of the lake was more beautified that day by the long lines of burning candles. The Swami sat at the lake-side for a while and then returned quite refreshed to his lodging. Next day the Swami went to the hermitage of the Irish monk as promised and held an interesting talk with him. Though both were monks, one was an atheist and a convert; while the other was a staunch theist and an orthodox devotee.

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[6] It is a Burmese word composed of Shwe-(gold) and dagon-(head)-The Pagoda is so called for its gold-plated crest.

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[7] The largest bell but damaged and never hung, is in Moscow.

[8] Burmese for a monk.

Irish Monk: All the religions in the world are empty and narrow: Buddhism alone is true and catholic. That is why half of humanity follows this faith and I have adopted it.

The Swami: We respect all the current religions of the world, as all of them are equally true and have the same goal in view.

Irish Monk: Who is the propounder of this doctrine?

The Swami: Sri Ramakrishna Deva, the Divine incarnation of this age, lived and taught this wonderful gospel.

Irish Monk: What is the peculiarity of his teaching?

The Swami: He realised and preached the harmony of religions. Buddha, Christ, Mahomet and all other world-teachers have each proclaimed that the religion taught by him is the only way to salvation. The difference betwen Sri Ramakrishna and other prophets is that he himself preached no new religion, but practised all religions in his life and experienced the universal truth underlying them all. His message, can be summed up in the sentence 'As many faiths, so many paths'. No teacher has laid so much emphasis on the infinity of the forms and aspects of the Divine. He was the perfect example of renunciation; and understanding that immortality cannot be attained without renunciation, he never touched women or wealth in his life. He looked upon his wife as the living from of the Divine Mother and worshipped her as he would worship the goddess Kali. He is perhaps the only instance of unbroken continence in conjugal life in the whole world. He had renounced 'gold' so completely from his mind that if he laid his hands even unconsciously on coins they would become contorted as though stung by a scorpion and his breathing would stop.

Irish Monk: The Buddha preached the gospel of Nirvana alone, which is attainable through the extinction of all desires. He did not believe in nor preach a God.

The Swami: In this holy land of India atheism cannot last long. Those who believe that Buddha was an atheist are very wrong. His silence about God or Soul was that of a mystic. He was a Jnani and taught the Aryan faith. His religion can certainly lead an aspirant to God-vision. So we Hindus worship him as an Incarnation of God.

The Swami further added that the human soul was in essence none other than Brahman, the Cosmic Being. A satisfactory solution of the Cosmic mystery was clearly found in the Vedas. There was much evidence of the fact that the Buddhists revered the Vedas and never reviled them. The Buddhist view followed the Vedic and was not something novel.

The Irish monk heaved a sigh of despair and said that the thing-in-itself was unknown and unknowable.

The Swami replied, "But Sri Ramakrishna said that God *is* knowable through a purified mind. The Devotee's heart is the parlour of God. He is One in experience; but many when approached intellectually". After a pause the Swami concluded by saying, "God is surely realisable through all religions. You could have attained liberation through the faith you were born in, and have therefore committed a blunder by changing it. According to the Hindu scriptures death is desirable in one's own ancestral Dharma; for the Dharma that is not one's own is fraught with fear."

At Rangoon Swami Ramakrishnananda met the Bengali poet Nabin Chandra Sen, who happened to be there at that time. The Poet admitted, in the course of a conversation with the Swami, that our age needed an Avatara of the Ramakrishna type, since the various religions and cultures of the world, tended to come together now. Swami Ramakrishnananda told Him that the prophet of the age did appear in the person of Sri Ramakrishna, and that humanity should sit at his feet in peace and amity to learn the gospel of religious synthesis lived and taught by him. The poet was highly impressed with the Swami's broad vision and magnetic personality and asked his blessings for his son who was practising as a barrister at Rangoon.

Sarat Chandra Chatterjee who was then a keen student of Darwin, Tyndall, Mill, Huxley and other rationalist thinkers of Europe in the nineteenth century introduced himself to the Swami as an atheist. He had no belief in God and no sympathy for monks. He had never come in contact with true sannyasins. But coming in touch with a saintly monk like Swami Ramakrishnananda his outlook on life was transformed. Daily he used to visit the Swami and enjoyed his holy association, and talk. The illuminating conversation held with the Swami is reproduced here from the Bengali book of Girindranath Sarkar, a close companion of Sarat Chandra in Rangoon.

One day when Sarat Chandra declared himself an atheist the Swami observed, " Atheists are in the core of their hearts true theists as they are always searching for God, though indirectly. Those whose minds are busily engaged in the search for God directly or indirectly cannot be atheists. In order to ascertain the true existence of God, one has but to study attentively the marvellous secrets of creation. The existence of God can be easily understood by the chain of cause and effect. No effect is possible without a precedent cause. So long as creation is there, there must be its Creator. There cannot be any doubt about it."

Sarat Chandra: Nature may be called the cause of creation.

The Swami: Then the cause of nature's origin should be called God.

Sarat Chandra: If God is the cause of Nature, who is then His cause?

The Swami: God's will-power is the cause of nature and God himself is the source of His will-power. It is beyond the capacity of human intelligence to ascertain the First Cause or God without the knowledge of Brahman, the self-existent, beginningless One without a second. In order to know the ultimate reality one must place implicit faith in the preceptor and scripture. Haphazard attempts will not do.

Sarat Chandra: Reasoning and learning can lead us some distance; but beyond that it is all dark.

The Swami: Who says it is all dark? Search for Him earnestly; you are sure to see Him. Beyond the darkness of doubt shines the region of eternal light and infinite bliss. Those who are really sincere are without doubt blessed with the beatific vision of God. The annals of world-religions are replete with incontrovertible evidence of this indubitable fact. The worldly-minded only hear of religion but they neither truly believe in it nor sincerly practise it.

Sarat Chandra: Can you tell me, Swamiji, why this disbelief assails us?

The Swami: This disbelief is almost an insurmountable obstacle in the spiritual life. It is not only an obstacle but a disease! The past life tendencies ingrained in the mind do not allow us to proceed in the path of the spirit. Those tendencies are to be worked out by spiritual exercises and good deeds. He on whom faith descends is very fortunate. He needs nothing else. He is saved and the only prophylactic he needs is discrimination. Discrimination, as the messenger of God, moves with us always. Its forgetfulness sets at naught all our spiritual endeavours.

Sarat Chandra: You have worshipped and served Sri Ramakrishna so long. What have you gained?

The Swami: He is not for us only. He appeared for the welfare of the whole world. In order to fulfil the divine promise given in the Gita, the Lord does appear on earth in flesh and blood whenever virtue subsides and vice prevails. He is born as man for the protection of the pious and the salvation of the sinners, as Christ, as Mohammed, as Buddha, as Sankara and as Gouranga, with the mission of establishing religious harmony. He is the living example of the Gospel of Gita. The unprecedented example of his renunciation of lust and lucre, his twelve years of extraordinarily austere penances as well as his proclamation of 'As many faiths, so many paths' have ushered in a new epoch in the religious world. His message came like the ambrosial waters of peace to the parched hearts of the 'heavy laden'. He has rightly said, 'Soul, world and the twentyfour categories do exist; because God exists. Without Him nothing else can exist. The sun and the moon and all the stars have borrowed His inextinguishable light. Zeros coming after the figure of one possess great value, but if the one is wiped out, zeros lose their value. Life, wealth and other possessions are like magic. Today they are; tomorrow they are not. The lives of most men are wasted in the search for wealth, fame and enjoyments, in the fulfilment of desires. But alas! few care for a glimpse of God who is the *summum bonum* of human life.'

Sarat Chandra: Why can we not see Him?

The Swami: Sri Ramakrishna said, "There are jewels in the bed of the ocean. If you want them, dive deep to the bottom. You can't get them if you float and swim on the surface of the ocean. God does exist, and if you wish to see Him you must undergo a regular course of spiritual disciplines for a certain period. If the pond is covered with hyacinth you should not think that there is no water in it. If you wish to see the water, remove hyacinth. None can see God with eyes blinded by Maya. The veil of Maya must be torn asunder to have a vision of God.

Sarat Chandra: What is this Maya?

The Swami: Maya is that illusory and inexplicable power of God that has created this phenomenal world. It has bewildered all creatures. Our mind overpowered by it, is attached to wife, wealth, children, fame etc. This magic power makes us believe that these transitory things are eternal. None can escape from the clutches of Maya without the saving grace of God. He is all-love, all-good; He thinks constantly of our well-being as does a loving mother of her only child. But we do not sincerely ask for His grace, which descends only when penitent tears are shed. We should surrender ourselves to Him, depend on Him entirely and constantly pray for His grace with tearful eyes. His grace dawns when He sees that we really love Him and want Him only and not woman and wealth. When the mind is entirely engrossed with worldly objects what is the use of making a lip-prayer to God? Such shallow love cannot move His heart. When this hypocrisy will go and the mind will be pure and simple like that of a child we shall be blessed with His grace.

Sarat Chandra: If He is so eager for the good of all men, why then have they so much misery?

The Swami: God is the abode of all good and all power. Whatever He does is always for the good of the creatures. Though parents also wish well of their children yet they are not unselfish and almighty. In spite of being the embodiment of these two qualities, if He allots sorrows and sufferings to anyone then know it for certain that it is His blessing in disguise. What we call misery is in fact His kindness. We forget God in our greed for transient pleasures. So He makes us remember Him by these little miseries. His kindness is expressed through both fovourable and unfavourable circumstances. When He adorns the play-house of life with wife, wealth, friends, fame etc., desired by us it is the *pleasant* kindness of God. But when he takes them away one after another, makes us shed tears and drags us forcibly towards Him it is His *unpleasant* kindness.

Sarat Chandra: I am at a loss to understand the true significane of fate, personal effort, divine grace etc.

The Swami: In this world we find some beautiful, some ugly; some high, some low; some brahmins, some pariahs; some happy, some miserable; some virtuous, some vicious; some kind, some cruel; some acquiring fame by good deeds, some looked down upon for being scavengers. If one enquires into the root-causes of such diversities, it is found that past-life actions are responsible for them. Our life is moulded by the powers of both divine grace and personal effort. The present life is in part the effect of actions done in past lives. Results of actions done in this life are partly experienced here and partly in the next as fate. Personal effort also depends on divine grace. Bereft of His grace, personal effort is powerless. When God's grace is combined with personal effort everything turns favourable and every undertaking becomes successful.

Sarat Chandra: How can fate be got rid of?

The Swami: Wordly people are immersed in egoism. But when they are oppressed by misery, grief, sickness, poverty and failure; when every effort, every undertaking, all care and cleverness fail, they think of fate and say it cannot be avoided.

Sarat Chandra: If the results of our actions are inevitable, what is the use of our worshipping God or of religious practices?

The Swami: I have great faith in what is called fatalism, but I cannot accept that fate is irremovable. I do not believe that good and bad, virtue and vice, happiness and misery and all pairs of opposites stored in the chamber of fate are irremovable. None but the supreme self is immutable, indivisible, incombustible, and indestructible in this universe. Wherever there is disease, there is remedy. Light follows darkness. Repression is shadowed by relief. Virtue succeeds vice. This is the eternal law of nature. If one uniform Law prevails in all matters why then should fate be an exception? If there be no way to lessen the burden of miseries why then do people acquire piety? What is the necessity of doing good to others, making charity, practising austerity, studying scriptures, going on pilgrimage, and offering prayers? What is the need of Divine incarnations if there be no escape from what is fated? What is then the significance of the title of Christ as *the Saviour*, of Mohammed as *the Prophet*, of Sri Ramakrishna as *the Obliterator of Fate*? Lord Sri Krishna has clearly said. 'Take shelter only in Me, I shall liberate you from all sins.' The Saviour of our age has declared that penitent tears can wash off the sins of many lives. Swawi Vivekananda has given the name of *Kapalamochana* (Redeemer of Fate) to the Avataras. When God's grace descends even the inevitable can be averted.

If you weep and pray to God thus, "O gracious One! I am weak and helpless. Forgive the sins which I have committed in this or the previous life, knowingly or unknowingly. Remit the results of my evil actions." If you can sincerely weep with a contrite heart, He will surely pardon your sins. When the child weeps, the mother leaves all her work, however urgent, and hastens to her little one.

Sarat Chandra: Can all weep for their evil deeds?

The Swami: The trouble with some of you is that you are too clever. Throw away your cleverness; the way will be smooth and short. Laughter cannot lead one to God-vision. Those who saw Him had to weep long.

The rank atheism of young Sarat Chandra melted in the holy company of an illumined soul like Swami Ramakrishnananda. The dedicated, peaceful and pure life of the Swami left a deep impression on his troubled mind. The life of renunciation attracted him too, but only temporarily. His younger brother however became a monk of the Order with the name of Swami Vedananda. Sarat Chandra asked the Swami whether one could become a monk without putting on the ochre garb.

The Swami: Religion belongs almost wholly to the mind. Without donning the ochre robe of a monk one can attain salvation. First the mind is to be prepared. That is primary. The question of garb and other externals is secondary. It is in the mind that man is bound and in the mind he becomes free. If the mind is good, an ochre cloth is helpful; but if the mind is bad, it will only deceive. The ochre robe, the marks on the forehead, pilgrimage, kirtana, japa and austerity are not essentials in religion but are mere externals. These outer forms train the mind to be worthy of the divine grace.

Sarat Chandra: How then is liberation attained?

The Swami: Until one hankers after the ultimate Reality one cannot get the clue to the path of Salvation.

Sarat Chandra: What are the rules for joining your monastic Order?

The Swami: In order to be a monk of our Order one has to be a probationer for three years, then one has to remain a 'Brahmacharin' for another three years.[9] After these six years if the Spiritual Head of the Order considers one fit for sannyasa, then alone he will confer ceremonial sannyasa upon him. The monks of our Order must have the ideals of renunciation, self-control, devotion and service.

Sarat Chandra: What do they learn in that period of six years?

The Swami: The chief ideals of our Order are Renunciation and Service. A monk of our Order must sever all worldly ties, see God in all men and creatures and serve them as the veritable forms of God.

Sarat Chandra: True service can be learnt from our mothers at home. None can show a greater example of service and sacrifice than the Hindu women who serve their sons and husbands wholeheartedly.

The Swami: There is a trace of selfishness in the wife's service to her husband or the mother's to her son. But the monks of our Order pick up helpless men from the streets and serve them with care and love as the sick Narayana.

Sarat Chandra: The rules of your monastery appear to be very strict and hard. Six long years of apprenticeship! Why, one can become a doctor by studying for six years in a medical college!

The Swami: A doctor can cure only the bodily ailments of others. But if one becomes a monk, one can escape the wheel of transmigration, and help others to do so.

Sarat Chandra: Millions of monks congregate at every *Kumbha Mela*. Will all of them escape from birth and death?

The Swami: Of them, some are out for the sake of the belly, some for fame, some to earn money by giving medicines, and some to avoid police vigilance. It is not possible for a man to renounce the world and become a true monk without having performed penances in his past lives.

In this way the Swami received all visitors kindly and took pains to enlighten them. The festival was prolonged as long as he stayed in Burma. The five days of festivity passed away in no time and the day of this departure arrived. Many Bengali and South Indian devotees assembled that day to take leave of the Swami. Many of them did obeisance to him, and received his blessings. The eyes of his host as of all others were full of tears. The Swami also was very much moved at the time of parting. The transforming contact of the Swami, though short, brought about a life-long change in the lives of a good many people of Rangoon.

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[9] These periods have now been extended to four years in each case.

The Swami sailed from Rangoon on Saturday the 25th and reached Madras on the 29th morning and proceeded the same evening on invitation to Bombay, to attend the celebration there. The seed that was sown by this apostle as early as 1905 in Rangoon grew into a many-branched tree some years later. Till the World War II the Ramakrishna Mission owned the biggest hospital as well as the biggest library and reading room in Rangoon.

CHAPTER X

ETERNAL UNION

SWAMI Ramakrishnananda had wholeheartedly wished that the Holy Mother and Swami Brahmananda should sanctify the main field of his activity and bless the devotees there by visits to the South. The fulfilment of his pious wish gave him profound satisfaction. One day he was heard saying to himself, ' My work is over '. In the middle of 1910, shortly after the Holy Mother's departure from Madras to Calcutta, Swami Ramakrishnananda was taken seriously ill. His robust constitution was already broken by the fourteen years of strenuous toil that he had had to undergo as the pioneer of the Ramakrishna Order in the South. Asked about the cause of the premature breakdown of his health, he calmly observed, ' Madras life was too strenuous.' But he was too humble to take the credit of his success himself, and added, " It is no credit of mine. The Master's grace and Swamiji's (Vivekananda's) command are mainly responsible for the success of my work in the South." In order to establish the movement in South India, he so overworked himself to the utter negligence of his health that he soon became a victim of diabetes, consumption and cough. In 1910, he went to Bangalore for a change towards the end of the year and stayed there in the Ashrama for some time. The doctor there diagnosed his case as one of galloping phthisis. The bracing climate of Bangalore failed to improve his health. Therefore at the entreaties of the President and the Secretary of the Order he decided to go to Calcutta for treatment and rest.

Swami Brahmananda was then at Puri. Receiving a wire from Madras about Swami Ramakrishnananda's departure, he hastened to the railway junction at Khurda Road to meet his sick brother. When the Madras Mail arrived at the station, Swami Brahmananda got into the compartment. Swami Ramakrishnananda prostrated himself before him. The latter then exclaimed, 'Sashi, what is all this? Shake it off ! ' Sashi replied, ' Raja, that is possible only through your blessings.' Swami

Brahmananda repeated his query and received the same reply. He then gave him the necessary instructions for treatment and came out of the compartment. It was their last meeting. In Calcutta Swami Ramakrishnananda was accommodated in the monastery known as the Udbodhan Office at Baghbazar, and placed under the experienced treatment of noted physicians. He lived there only for two months and eleven days. In spite of the best treatment and careful nursing his condition became gradually critical. Dr. Bepin Behari Ghose, a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, examined him carefully and gave the alarming report that the Swami would not live more than three months. Kaviraj Durga Prasad Sen, who treated him for some time, one day asked him, "Do you see such things as a crematorium or a grove of *Tulasi* plants etc. in your dreams?" To this the Swami said, 'No, I don't see them; but I frequently see the Master, the Holy Mother, Swamiji, the Dakshineswar temple and the Cossipore garden in my dreams." This Kaviraj, as a boy, was a student of Kaviraj Gangaprasad Sen who had treated Sri Ramakrishna for some time. When the Master had gone to Kaviraj Gangaprasad, it was the boy Durgaprasad who had examined him and diagnosed his disease as one born of Yogic practices.

Swami Ramakrishnananda also came under the treatment of Sir Nilratan Sarkar, Dr. Younan and other celebrated physicians of Calcutta, but his disease became rapidly acute. He could not eat anything at all. In the morning a few pieces of cream-cracker biscuits soacked in milk and at noon a few morsels of rice were his main diet. For some time he had to subsist entirely on milk diet according to medical advice. Swami Saradananda often sat by his side at meal-time and persuaded him to swallow a few more morsels. One day Swami Ramakrishnananda got annoyed with him and said, "My eating is being gradually stopped. Mahamaya, the world-enchantress, does not allow me to eat any more. Please don't take the trouble of coming to me during my meal time."

The Swami's condition soon became worse. His cough increased to such an extent that he began to vomit blood. Nights were passed without a wink of sleep. The burning sensation all over the body intensified and two attendants had to fan him continually. He would roll on his bed restlessly from side to side with intense pain. His body became reduced to a skeleton. He looked like a dwarf with sunken eyes and an empty look. One day unable to bear the physical pain he brought down the picture of the Master from the wall and holding it against his breast prayed, "Oh Lord, why do you put me to all this suffering? I have committed no sin consciously with this body. Why then is all this suffering allotted to me? Give me peace, beloved Master." Then he handed over the picture to the attendant saying, "Put back the picture of my heart's delight on the wall." A brother of Swami Saradananda who had been studying the prescriptions carefully from the beginning wished to take up the treatment since all other treatment had failed. Swami Saradananda conveyed his brother's wish to the ailing Swami, who, then kept quiet and afterwards sent his message,—"I have dedicated my body, mind and life at the lotus-feet of the Master. Swamis Brahmananda, Premananda and others, who are the living representatives of the Master, are here. Let the treatment be continued strictly according to their instructions. Saradananda or anybody else should not interfere in the matter. As for myself I have no opinion of my own. Let His will be done." A distinguished devotee of Madras had come all the way to Calcutta to have a last sight of the Swami, who was very kind and cordial to him and made eager enquiries of his many friends there. On this occasion as on some others he expressed a desire to go back to Madras and die in the holy birthplace of the great Acharyas.

Most remarkable however was the strength of his spirit, which continued to pour forth and dwell upon the eternal verities of life even whilst the body suffered most. One who loved him dearly hearing him speak during the distressed state of his body begged him to desist. "Why?" came the reply, "When I speak of the Lord all pain leaves me. I forget the body." His great esteem and love for Christ, which were manifest throughout his lifetime, renewed themselves constantly in those last days. Speaking of Jesus he would become inspired. He would tell how Sri Ramakrishna had regarded him and how during Samadhi when the Master had had the vision of Christ, the very body of Christ had entered into his own. At times when acute suffering of the body intervened, he would turn to the monks and devotees about him, saying, "How long shall I endure this? The body is unable to stand this." There came a time when the fell disease inflamed his brain. Yet even in delirium his mind and his voice knew no other thoughts but those of the Lord. 'Durga', the name of the Divine Mother, 'Siva', 'Siva', the name of the Lord of monks, and the name of his beloved Master were ever on his lips.

Girish chandra Ghosh's Bengali drama, '*Sankaracharya*' was published about this time. According to his instruction a portion of it was read out to the Swami. He liked very much the scene in which Sankara meets the outcaste at Benares. The story goes that on the way to the Ganges an outcaste accompanied by four dogs crossed Sankara's path, whereupon he ordered the untouchable to clear off the road with an air of derision. The outcaste who was the God Brahma in disguise said to his dog companions which were the four Vedas in disguise, "Who is this fellow? What does he say?" The Swami mimicked this line and enjoyed the scene.

But soon after he refrained from hearing the drama, saying, "It's nothing but a stroke of the pen!"

Girish Ghosh's old widowed sister who used to visit Swami Ramakrishnananda almost daily before returning home after her bath in the Ganges, seeing the Brahmacharins hard at work nursing the Swami once sympathised with them like a mother. At this the Swami sharply said, "Who else will serve us except they? They have renounced the world and become our own. Their life is being blessed by serving us. By serving us they serve the Master!" Two or three days before the eternal union one morning at about 8 or 9 while he lay quiet on his bed with eyes closed as though asleep, he suddenly called out to his attendant (a Brahmachari) who was silently waiting in a corner of the room and said, "Sri Guru Maharaj, the Holy Mother and Swamiji have come. Spread a mat for them to sit down and place three pillows to lean against." The attendant who could not see anything was confounded. But when the Swami again said, "Don't you see, they are standing?", he did as directed. Then he bowed down to the invisible ones thrice most respectfully with folded hands as if he actually saw the three divine personages before him. After some time he said to the attendant, "Now they have left; remove the mat and the pillows." As the Swami's end drew near, the living presence of the Lord with whom he longed to be eternally united grew more and more tangible to him and the world faded totally from his consciousness.

As the days passed and his condition grew worse, the monks knew that the time for the eternal union was at hand. The Swami who was aware of his approaching end, became anxious to have a sight of the Holy Mother, then residing at Jayarambati. A messenger was sent there to convey the prayer of the sinking Swami. The compassionate mother could not come to Calcutta but granted a mystic vision to her beloved son. The Swami seems to have been blessed with this vision on the last night of his earthly sojourn; for, on the following morning, the last day of his life he communicated his vision to Pulin Behari Mitra, and asked him to compose a Bengali song the fist line of which he himself dictated. Unable to do it himself, Pulin Babu hastened to Girish Chandra Ghosh, the famous composer and actor-dramatist and a great disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and conveyed to him the ideas with which he soon composed a Bengali song. The following is a free rendering of the song: "The night of misery is at an end. The terrible nightmare of 'I' and 'mine' is gone. The illusion of life and death is no more. See, the sun of illumination is dawning and the Mother Divine is smiling. Holding the tokens of grace and protection in her hands she blesses us. Raise the voice high and sing the glories of the Mother to the beat of the drum. The earth is full of the Mother's name that removes the fear of death. The Mother says, 'Do not weep, my child. See the lotus-feet of Bhagavan Ramakrishna before you. Then all worries will vanish, all pain will go.' The gracious Mother, the saviour of the devoted ones, is seen standing by my side with her two eyes radiant with compassion."

The song was sung by the famous singer, Pulin Behari Mitra, a lay disciple of Swami Vivekananda. It was repeatedly sung to the Swami who listened with rapt attention. The song must have renewed in him the memory of his wonderful vision. After this, as desired by him, Swami Vivekananda's Hymn of Samadhi was sung to him by the same renowned singer. The Swami while listening to the wonderful song passed into deep meditation. On the last day Dr. J. N. Kanjilal saw that the patient was much better. From the morning of that day he went into Samadhi frequently. A few hours before the final departure he took a sip of the sanctified water. The last three hours he ramained absorbed in the supreme state of Samadhi. In the last hour his fair face reddened. There was a slight perspiration all over the body. He then entered Mahasamadhi, the eternal union with his beloved Lord. It was an hour and ten minutes after 12 noon of August 21, 1911. The monks stood around the departed Swami and sang aloud the name of their Master. At that moment the presence of the lord was felt by all. The death chamber turned as it were, into a tabernacle, a temple of illumination.

Frank G. Alexander, an American disciple of Swami Vivekananda and the author of *In the Hours of Meditation* who had contacted Swami Ramakrishnananda in India wrote in memory of the departed saint the following inspiring poem containing a beautiful picture of Swami's final Illumination:

ILLUMINATION[1]

Realisation, Infinite, Supreme
Above the world, Whose Region is the Soul
Where lives Eternal Truth Supreme
As Boundless Freedom, like a shoreless sea,
That hath this sage become.
With the passing of the body unto death

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[1] Published in *Prabuddha Bharata* Oct, 1911

His soul on purest thought did rise
To that height where thought is dead
And sages' Wisdom doth alone endure.
It rose, emancipated from the form,
On Argent Wings of Great Celestial Peace
Into that Vastness of the Everlasting Self
Whose Form is Radiance Eternal,
Whose Soul, Realisation Infinite;
It rose above the world to God.
Scattered are the many earthly bonds
Which made the personality of him—
Now stands he, Self revealed, as God.
In life he taught 'Tat Tvam Asi'
Whose Consciousness is Everlasting Life
Now—the Truth, 'Tat Tvam Asi'
With him "Aham Brahmasmi" is verily become.
He, the Bhakta, in Bhakti hath been merged.
The Bhakta and the Lord are now made One
In the Light which is Nirvana's Height
Above the ignorance and darkness of the world.

When the body was brought down to the ground floor of the Udbodhan Math, Sister Nivedita bowed most respectfully at the feet of the departed saint. The body was then covered with flowers and garlands and carried in the afternoon in a procession. The air was laden with the fragrance of flowers heaped on the bier and the perfume of the incense burnt around it. The procession was preceded by a *Sankirtana* party and followed in the rear by a large gathering of monks, devotees, men and students. Now and then the air was rent with the shouts: "*Jai Sri Guru Maharajji Ki Jai! Jai Sri Swamiji Maharajji Ki Jai! Jai Mahamayi Ki Jai! Jai Swami Ramakrishnanandaji*

Maharajji Ki Jai." And while the long procession went north and farther north along the side of the Ganges men, women and children ran to the street and the poor scrambled for the pice which were thrown about as charity. On the way the bier was placed in the Cossipore Garden and the whole of the *Rama Nama Kirtana* was sung by the party. Opposite across the river some miles distant from Baghbazar was the Head Monastery of the Ramakrishna Order at Belur. Before the procession reached this point it stopped at the cremation ground of Cossipore, where the body of Sri Ramakrishna had been cremated. Holy, thrice holy, is this place to the Order. Here the cot on which the physical form of the extinct Sage lay, was lowered to the ground. Reverentially the monks and devotees bowed and worshipped. Again came the deafening shouts of praise to the Lord. Then the procession moved on to the point on the river bank opposite the Belur Math.

A score of boats were ready to carry the party. By this time the sun sank beneath the horizon. As the river was calm so was the hour quiet and hushed with great peace. Slowly and silently the boat traversed the distance over the river and reached the ghat of the monastery. The procession accompanied by the monks of the monastery went through the courtyard in front of the old chapel and crossed the extensive grounds of the monastery to the south-eastern corner of the Vivekananda Memorial. At this place the pyre had been erected. Here the Swami's body was to be consumed by fire, just as his personality had been burnt in the effulgence of the illumination. The cot on which the sage lay in eternal union was placed on this pyre. As the twilight deepened into night, the rising flames wrapped the body and reduced it to ashes. The fire was extinguished by the sacred waters of the Ganges and the relics were collected for preservation. No memorial ofany kind as yet, marks the spot to tell the visitors its sanctity, but his memory is enshrined in the hearts of the monks and devotees of the Order.

Hearing of the Swami's death the Holy Mother wept bitterly and said, 'My heart is broken.' She was so much overwhelmed with grief that for a good many days she spoke often of her departed son. When

Swami Brahmananda received the sad news at Puri, he exclaimed in a voice heavy with grief, "The guardian angel of the South has passed away. The southern side has become dark." During his second visit to Madras in July 1916, Swami Brahmananda often used to speak of Swami Ramakrishnananda and his unique life and work. At Madras Math he said once, 'The influence of Sashi Maharaj, like that of Sankara the great conqueror, shines bright in the South. Ramu and Ramanuja who are his unique creations cherish profound regard for Sri Guru Maharaj. They are shedding their heart's blood for the monastery and the Students' Home at Madras'.

The sad news of Swami Ramakrishnananda's death was received with grief by the public of Madras and of other places in the South and memorial meetings were held in honour of the saint in several towns. The following is a brief account of the meeting held in the metropolis of South India.

In Madras a big meeting of influential Hindu citizens was held at the Pachaiyappa's Hall on the 4th September 1911, to express deep sorrow at the death of the Swami. The Hon'ble Mr. Justice P. R. Sundra Iyer, took the chair and among those present were the Hon'ble Mr. P. S. Sivaswami Iyer, the Hon'ble Dewan Bahadur L. A. Govinda Raghava Iyer, Prof. M. Rangachariar, Mr. (Later Sir) C.P. Ramaswami Iyer, Mr. G. A. Natesan, Dr. M. C. Nanjunda Rao and other distinguished citizens. The chairman in opening the proceedings said that they were assembled to express their profound sorrow and the sense of great loss they had sustained by the death of the Revered Swami Ramakrishnananda, who was one of the most distinguished monks of the Ramakrishna Mission. He added, "The Mission is unique in character, in its aims, and the scope of its work. The sannyasis of the Ramakrishna Mission seek nothing for themselves and consecrate their lives to the service of humanity in all directions, secular, moral, religious and spiritual. Of those who had devoted themselves to preach the universality of our culture and philosophy, Swami Ramakrishnananda whose loss we mourn, was one of the best. I had known him pretty intimately. All night and day he had devoted himself to public work. He had been holding classes for young men in the various parts of the city and several institutions had their origin in his good work. He had written several books of great usefulness. It was always a matter of surprise to me how a single man could do the amount of work that the late Swami had been doing single-handed. He had consecrated his life to the public and a good man like him never could be said to have died. He is still with us and his spirit would continue to be an inspiration to us."

C. Ramanujachariar next read a number of messages of sympathy from different parts of the country. Among them V. Krishnaswami Iyer paid a glowing tribute to the memory of the late Swami and his noble and enduring work.

Sir P. S. Sivaswami Iyer, who was then the Advocate-General, moved the first resolution which ran as follows:—

"That the Hindu community of Madras in this meeting assembled do place on record the deep sense of loss sustained by them in consequence of the demise of Swami Ramakrishnananda, and also the high and respectful admiration of his pure, noble and absolutely unselfish life spent in labouring incessantly and unostentatiously for the moral and spiritual welfare of the people of South India."

In so doing, he said that the Resolution drew their attention to all those beautiful traits in the life of the late Swami who had endeared himself to them all during his life time, and had won for him their admiration and reverence. He added further, "The Swami had been working in their midst for nearly fifteen years, and during all that time he had been labouring amongst all sorts and conditions of men, students and older people, and had tried to implant in them the seeds of spiritual and moral culture. He had sacrificed his time and energy to the cause to which he had devoted himself, and had been inspired by nothing but unalloyed zeal for the good of his country. Perhaps there had been greater men than he intellectually; but in moral stature the late Swami had not yielded to any of the numerous missionaries who had been sent by the Ramakrishna Mission out into the world. The late Swami had been absolutely free from all forms of selfishness, and had cast his lot, not among the fashionable world of New York, London, or other Western cities, but in the benighted city of Madras; for he had felt it as a sacred call to work in the midst of his countrymen. He had laboured without any attempt to win any sort of public recognition. The various religious classes he had been holding in Madras bore ample testimony to the good influence which he had been excercising on us all. A life like the late Swami's must be regarded as one of the finest products of the movement which derived its impetus from the life and teachings of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa....The place occupied by the late Swami in our midst was not easy to fill."

The Hon. Mr. T. V. Seshagiri Iyer seconded the resolution and said that he had the privilege of knowing the Swami intimately and that he had been in himself an object-lesson to those who came into contact with him. The great characteristic of Swami Ramakrishnananda was his absolute selflessness and his love for his fellow-men. He further added, "The Swami had been kindness personified. So far as I know he had not given expression to a single unkind word. He had been sweet and serene and reminded one of the great sages of this land, who blessed even their detractors. He loved his country for what it had been in the past and for its potentialities in the future. The late Swami's sympathies were cosmopolitan. To Madras he had given the best portion of his life. It was impossible to adequately commemorate his memory; but it was in everyone's power to follow in his footsteps."

Justice C. V. Kumaraswami Shastriar supported the resolution and said that the life of the Swami was a life of self-sacrifice, and a life of renunciation, which however in his case was identical with service. Mr. G. A. Natesan paid a tribute to the memory of the Swami and gave instances of numerous good deeds that the Swami had done in Madras, the most important of which was, in his opinion, the Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home. The resolution was put to the meeting and carried amidst solemn silence, the audience rising to their feet.

Prof. Rangachariar next moved the second resolution: "That suitable steps be taken to preserve the memory of his exemplary religious life, fresh and green among us, and also to advance the object for which he had dedicated his life." In an eloquent speech he described vividly the life of service and sacrifice led by the Swami. Mr. K. Srinivasa Iyengar seconded the proposition and said that they could scarcely do better than by making it possible for that good work which the Swami had been doing to continue for ever.

Mr. C. P. Ramaswami Iyer in supporting the resolution said, "What nobler work can be found for us than to follow and help in the good cause to which Swami Ramakrishnananda had devoted himself."

On the motion of Mr. V. Masilamani Pillai, a committee, was formed with Messrs C. P. Ramaswami Iyer and C. Ramanujachariar as secretaries to carry out the objects of the meeting and to determine the form of the memorial of the departed Saint. The proceedings concluded with a vote of thanks to the chair.[2]

The Brahmavadin of Madras for October, 1911 wrote the following editorial: "Madras has in the death of Swami Ramakrishnananda sustained a severe loss. For nearly fourteen years in spite of bad health he worked steadily in Southern India generally and in Madras partiaularly, spread the rare knowledge of Vedanta and made it better understood. The popularity and influence of the Ramakrishna Mission in Southern India is largely due to his untiring labours and his exemplary life. In the classes that he held and in the lectures that he gave, there was nothing of that mysticism...the temptation to lay stress on the grosser aspects of yoga practices which is very great in the present age...the bane of some recent religious movements. We can pay no greater tribute to the memory of the late Swami whose blessings we ever sought than to state that he never countenanced such sickening perversions of truth and religion which corrupt the country. We revered him when he was alive and his memory we cherish with profound respect and love."

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[2] Vide *Madras Mail*, Sept 5, 1911.

CHAPTER XI

ECSTATIC DEVOTION TO THE GURU

THE devotion which Swami Ramakrishnananda cherished for the Guru was so unique and ecstatic that it beggars description. What St. Paul declared in his Epistle to the Galatian—'Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me,' described perfectly the Swami's attitude towards himself and his Guru. Sister Devamata rightly estimates that the Swami was dead wholly to himself and alive only in Sri Ramakrishna and there was no consciousness of anything but his Master. She further adds: ' His coming and going, his eating and sleeping, his labour and teaching, his entire living took their rise in the will of the Master, never in his own desire and convenience. Those who saw him carry his Master's picture pressed close to his heart, his body bent over it in protection as he walked in rain from the carriage to the entrance to the new Math at Mylapore (Madras), when he moved the shrine there from the Ice House, could appreciate the tenderness of love, the power of devotion for his Guru which transfused his being. He could say of his Master as truly as St. Paul said of his, ' The life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith in the son of God.'

As a salt doll loses its separate existence in the sea, so did Swami Ramakrishnananda merge his individulity in his Master. He lived to glorify his Master, and to carry out his mission. As at Alambazar and Baranagore, so at Madras, the greatest field of his public activity, he kept himself always in the background and placed his Guru in the forefront. Swami Vivekananda reached Madras in February, 1897 from Colombo and spent nine days there giving lectures and talks. His personality was so dazzling that people were charmed by it and forgot to think of his Master. Swami Ramakrishnananda went to Madras in March of the same year and preached first his Master's life and message. It is from him that the people of Madras and South India came to know of Sri Ramakrishna. He made the monastery centre round the shrine. To him the Master's picture was nothing short of a personality ever alive. He felt the abiding presence of the Master in the shrine and moved accordingly. Whenever he went out he would take leave of his

Guru as a son does of his parents. Whenever he returned from a place he would enter the shrine first of all and unbosom himself to his Master. The summer of Madras was oppressively hot. So on sultry afternoons and nights the Swami would fan his Master for hours with great devotion uttering, ' Glory to the Guru '. He would not eat anything which was not offered to the Master. Being diabetic he was medically advised to live on a wheat diet. But he never took it even for sake of health as it was not offered to the Guru. The Guru's words were to him above all advice. Swami Ramakrishnananda's monastic life was one of continued austerity and privation. He never spoke to any one of his difficulties. At times he would only speak out his mind standing before the picture of his Guru which he worshipped in the shrine. One evening a few devotees came to the Math to meet the Swami. They understood that the Swami was in the shrine and waited for him. Presently they heard him calling out in loud and angry tones, " You have brought me here, Old Man, and left me helpless! Are you testing my powers of patience and endurance? I will not go and beg hereafter for my sake or even for yours. If anything comes unasked, I will offer it to you and share the *prasadam*. Or I will bring sea-sands for offering to you and I shall live upon that! " The devotees, who were waiting outside the shrine, did not quite follow his words. They guessed that the Swami was quarrelling with somebody. But in fact, he was talking with his Master in a distressed mood.

The first building of the monastery at Madras had cracked in several places within two years of its construction. During the rains water would come down through the fissures in the ceiling. At such times the Swami would go into the shrine to ascertain whether water leaked through the roof. One night it began to drip inside the shrine too, and right on Sri Ramakrishna's likeness. The Swami stood there holding an umbrella till the night wore out and the rains stopped. He did not remove the picture to a safer side as by that he would be awakening his Master from his sleep at an untimely hour, and that would be wrong[1].

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[1] See the article of Rao Saheb. C. Ramaswami Iyengar in the *Vedanta Kesari* for September, 1930.

Extraordinary devotion to the Guru was the secret of Swami Ramakrishnananda's miraculous success. "If we cannot get on altogether without help, then why not ask the Lord Himself for it? Why go to others?" he would say. Once the birth-day anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna drew near and no money was collected for the poor-feeding which formed the most expensive item of the celebration. A devotee, who was sleeping at the Math suddenly woke up at midnight roused by strange sounds in the hall. He looked about and saw the Swami pacing up and down like a lion in a cage, humming heavily at every breath. He was afraid to see him in that inspired mood. The Swami was praying for help to the Lord for the feeding of the poor. Such selfless and hearty prayer never go unheard. The Lord sent help the next morning. A large donation was received from the Yuvaraja of Mysore who had read the Swami's new book 'Universe and Man' and began to admire him. Indeed the Lord helps those who depend on Him solely.

Devotion to the Guru was the strength of the Swami's spiritual life. He believed that when a disciple gets unflinching faith in the Guru his salvation is assured. His realisation was that the *Ishtam* who is Guru in human form is sure to bestow his grace on such a disciple. Swami Ramakrishnananda's ecstatic feeling for the Guru was shown in these words spoken to a devotee one day: "If we are caught in a labyrinth and some one comes and says 'I can show you the way out', what should we do? We should follow him. And the gratitude we feel is what we call worship and devotion. This person is the Guru and we should follow him implicitly, if we want to escape from the labyrinth. Sometimes, however, we think, 'Why should I follow him? Let me find out my own way. So we go off by ourselves. But he is always so patient and loving that he waits until we grow weary trying to find the way alone and come back to him." Again to a devotee as they sat together one evening in the Math at Mylapore, he said. "The work of the Guru is done in a very few minutes, for by a few simple words he gives a new turn to the life just like when a man is riding a bicycle some one sees that the road the rider is taking would lead to danger, so he turns him round and puts him in another direction. The man keeps on pedalling as before and the bicycle keeps on moving; but now the man is moving away from danger instead of towards it. Similarly the Guru sees that the direction you have taken is dangerous, so he turns you round. All your activities may go on as before. You may keep on pedalling just the same but now you are riding in a safe direction. The Guru's work is to give the right direction."

It is said that a great sage visited the temple of Dakshineshwar during the Master's stay there. When he prayed before the sacred image in the shrine the whole temple shook with the fervour of his devotion and prayer. So it seemed when Swami Ramakrishnananda conducted worship in the shrine. As he intoned the holy texts such pulsating ardour of devotion swept out from the shrine on the waves of that sweet chanting voice that the very walls of the monastery seemed to tremble. His worship was so deep and so heartfelt that he forgot himself and the world completely. It was a sight when with tears glistening in his eyes and lips quivering with emotion he chanted the hymns to Sri Ramakrishna. With what devotion he performed his services to the Guru may be gathered from the following incident. One morning a certain gentleman who held a high post in the Madras Government called at the Math to pay his respects to the Swami. It was 10-30 A.M., and after finishing the morning worship he was fanning the portrait of his Guru. For a couple of hours and more he went on fanning uttering the names of the Lord, '*Satguru*, *Sanatanaguru*, *Paramaguru*,' and so on. The gentleman, struck with awe and reverence, prostrated before him and returned home with the idea of seeing him some other day.

Whenever the Swami went to worship he would call for his *chudder*, throw it around him with a wide gesture and stride into the shrine erect and stately as a sovereign. His majestic bearing was the natural outcome of his lofty heritage as the son and servant of a mighty Master. "Divine Mother does not like us to call ourselves Her servants," he said to a devotee more than once. "We are children to Her, not servants. Always think of yourself as Her child." Swami

Ramakrishnananda looked upon himself as a child of God; hence his worship was so full of devotional fervour. He was a worshipper by birth as he learned it from his father, who was rigid in his observances of traditions and religious usages of his caste. If under the more radical influence of the Brahmo Samaj, the Swami in his youth reacted against it for a brief period, he returned to it with renewed ardour after coming in contact with his Guru. The divine ecstasy of the Master kindled flaming fire of devotion in his young mind. As in the life of the Master, so in that of his disciple worship played a very important part. No other disciple imbibed such an ecstasy of worship from the Master. His less orthodox brothers bantered him for his old-fashioned bell-ringing habits, but he remained unmoved. Not that he considered rites and ceremonies indispensable—for he knew they were secondary—but they were to him hallowed ways of deepening our devotional fervour and as such should be preserved and practised.

While making salutations to Sri Ramakrishna, the Swami would either prostrate on the ground with his palms folded and outstretched or stand holding his palms together over his heart and pressing together his teeth so hard together as to produce a chattering sound. At that time his whole frame would become stiff and his head down to the neck would show a slight tremor. By salutations his eyes slightly reddened and his face beamed with a heavenly glow and blessedness. After bath he would not look any other way but hasten straight to the shrine room while changing his cloth on the way. The wet cloth had to be picked up daily from different places on the way to the shrine. Swami Ramakrishnananda would often forget himeself while conducting the worship of the Master, so profound was his love and devotion to him. How vividly he realised the living presence of Sri Ramakrishna in the photograph before which he worshipped daily! The picture, indeed, was as living and real to him as his own self. Once in the month of June on a sultry day of the South Indian summer he felt awfully uneasy due to the excessive heat while enjoying a short siesta; he became quite restless, and suddenly got up. Then he quietly entered into the shrine thinking that the heat was also unbearable to the Master. So he began to fan the portrait of Sri Ramakrishna and then followed a series of soft loving words: "My Master! O the beloved of my heart! O my Master, O the beloved of my heart!"......This continued for about two hours. As he fanned and uttered these endearing words he forgot all about his surroundings, all about his body and all about the burning heat; only the living presence of the Master was real to him.

A close companion of his testifies that the Swami's devotion to his Guru was wonderful and unparalleled, and he revelled and lived in the idea that his Guru was ever alive. He had always with him a photo of Sri Ramakrishna which he carried with him wherever he went. He had to go often to other parts of the Madras Presidency for lecturing when he would take the photo with him. He felt the living presence of his Master so strongly in the photo that he considered it a grave failure of duty if he did not offer him food and serve him in sundry other ways. One day a devotee happened to go to the Math after 10 or 11 A.M. and stayed there enjoying his company till about 2 o'clock. When he was about to take leave at that time the Swami said, 'Wait, Guru Maharaj is taking his tiffin. I shall give you a little prasad!'. So saying he sat a little while as if he waited till his Guru had finished taking his tiffin and going to the shrine returned from there presently with a few fruits and sweets which he put into the devotee's hand as prasad with a loving grace.

This appeared rather queer to the devotee and threw him into a derisive mood. He ventured to pooh-pooh the Swami for thinking a dead man as alive and carrying his photo whenever he left the city. He thought that these actions indicated a certain aberration of the Swami's mind. Then followed a hot discussion between the Swami and the devotee. In the end the devotee was discomfitted, being amazed to see the depth and genuineness of the Swami's devotion to the Master. The Swami observed that the eyes and mind of the real devotee were peculiarly transformed and if others had not such eyes and mind it was not the fault of the devotees. The Swami went to the length of saying that the images in the temples were not simply dull, dead, inert matter, but were living gods who could be spoken to. He said this from a high altitude of spirituality which was beyond the comprehension of the gentleman; but the conviction somehow stole on him that what the Swami said could not but be true. The Swami practised what he said. Whenever he chanced to see a temple while going on the road he would at once lift his hand in salutation to God.

One day when the Master had been seated alone on the light bedstead in his room at the Kali temple, Swami Ramakrishnananda was going out of the room on some urgent errand. The Master interrupted him and said, " You see, He whom you seek is this, He is this, (pointing by his finger to himself.)' Swami Dhyanananda, who was an assistant to Swami Ramakrishnananda at Madras for years, testifies, " The latter mostly performed the worship himself and rarely delegated it to others. From his movements, and manners it appeared that he was dealing with the living personality of the Master." One night there was nothing to offer to the Master and Swami Ramakrishnananda was lying in the easy chair. Swami Dhyanananda asked him, 'What is to be done?' The senior Swami replied, ' Let us wait and see.' At last at about nine o'clock at night a student brought of his own accord some flour, ghee, coconut, sugar etc. for offering.

Now and then the Swami was found to be impatient and angry with his Master out of extreme love. Sometimes he was seen to move towards the Master's likeness with a closed fist or to say angrily, " Why do you put me to so much trouble? So-and-so ill-treated me, so-and-so applied harsh words to me. For that they are not to blame. You are responsible for all those misfortunes of mine." The worship of and offerings to the Master were done by him with clock-like punctuality. It was his rule to wait half an hour after the noon offering, twenty minutes after the night offering, and ten minutes after the afternoon offering. He often observed that the Master and the Holy Mother are identical like fire and its burning power. When the Holy Mother visited Madras he brought out the Master's utensils for her use. After drinking water from a tumbler the

Holy Mother of course said, 'Do not use this again for the Master' and Swami Ramakrishnananda obeyed her instruction strictly. When the Holy Mother arrived at Madras by train from Puri, Swami Ramakrishnananda came to the station with a motor car to escort her. It was summer. So the seats of the car became very hot. The Swami wet his own thin wrapper with pipe water and rubbed the seats cool. He saw the Master in the Holy Mother and hence served her as he would serve the Master.

On the evening of one birth-anniversary of Swami Ramakrishnananda the inmates of the Belur Math assembled in the visitors' room after *aratrikam.* Swami Suddhananda, the fifth president of the Ramakrishna Order reminiscently said in that gathering as follows among other things: "We saw his extraordinary devotion to the worship of the Master at the Alambazar Math. I had not then joined the Order. I spent one night on the *Tithipuja* day of Sri Ramakrishna's birth day. Swami Ramakrishnananda conducted worship from the morning of that day to the next morning. In those days '*Bhaja Shiva Omkara*' (meditate on Shiva whose sound from is Om) was chanted at the time of *aratrikam.* The Swami used to sing this and dance is joy so much that neighbours felt disturbed by him. The Alambazar Math was situated in a rented house of a crowded locality. The Swami who was a Sanskrit scholar, read while coming in a train a Sanskrit drama named *Hanumat nataka.* We sent him the writings of Swamiji (Vivekananda) for perusal. Hearing that Swamiji's Sanskrit hymn beginning with '*Om Hring etc.*' was sent to Mr. Pramathanath Tarkabhusan for corrections he was annoyed and remarked that Swamiji's mistakes, if any, should be regarded as *arsha prayoga* (Rishi's usages).

"That without resorting to pilgrimage if one sticks to a place and loves and serves the Master with singleminded devotion one can attain God-vision is what we learn from the life of Swami Ramakrishnananda. He did not visit even Benares. He had visited Rameswaram and other places of pilgrimage in South India not for his own sake but for the sake of the Holy Mother, Swami Brahmananda and Swami Premananda."

When the Swami came to the Belur Math he went straight way to the shrine and prostrated before the Master, without washing his feet and hands as is the custom. The Master presides over the monastery with his living presence and so he wished to meet him first of all. As at Baranagore and Alambazar, so at Madras he spent almost the whole forenoon in the worship of the Master. When he conducted worship one Brahmachari waited all attention to him and supplied to him immediately whatever he asked. He could not brook delay for any requisite at that time. As long as he sat for the Puja he uttered always 'Jai Guru' (glory to the Guru) in order to have an unbroken flow of the thought-current in the mind. He worshipped God with the idea that He was a living person.

He loved and served Swami Brahmananda so much that once hearing of his serious illness while at Madras Math he held the Master's likeness in his hands and said, 'Make Raja recover soon from his illness; otherwise I shall throw you into the sea!'

Once he took hot milk into the shrine for offering. While testing the warmth of the milk by dipping his finger into it he happened to burn and blister his finger. Placing the milk pot before the Master he said, in a complaining tone, 'You want to drink warm milk and my finger is burnt!' Once at dead of night his sleep broke on account of the mosquitoes entering into his curtain. While fanning out of his curtain the mosquitoes that increased like locusts in those days, it struck him that the mosquitoes must have also entered into the Master's curtain and disturbed his sleep. At once he left his bed, opened the shrine and got into it, raised the curtain and drove out the mosquitoes that were inside it. The Master's presence was as living and real to him as was his own physical existence. He understood the Master's difficulties and discomforts from his own standpoint.

Swami Ramakrishnananda told a devotee the story of Sukadeva running just after his birth through the forest and hills, his father Vyasa following him and crying, "Come back, my son, come back." The trees by the side of which Sukadeva passed were identified with him by his divine contact; and they responded for Suka.

But Maya could not touch Suka as he was totally free from attachment and ignorance." "We could never have formed a true idea of Sukadeva" observed Swami Ramakrishnananda "had we not seen our Master in the flesh. By his grace and blessings we firmly believe that Maya can be conquered in this very life." The devotee to whom the Swami told this remembers vividly even after more than half a century how the Swami's face glowed with inspiration of faith and sincerity when he uttered these words. Indeed through the grace of his Guru the Swami cut asunder the tentacles of Maya and helped many others to escape from its clutches.

To a Brahmacharin from Belur Math at the Madras Math, Swami Ramakrishnananda after preliminary enquiries asked what he had brought for Sri Guru Maharaj. When the Brahmacharin told him that he had no idea of it, nor any body told him about it at the Belur Math, he said mildly but with an emphasis, "Whenever you come from outside to the Math you must bring something for Sri Guru Maharaj who lives in and presides over the monastery". Seeing a basket with the new comer the Swami asked him what was inside the basket. The Brahmacharin told him that there was a surplus of some fruits and sweets brought for the journey. The Swami was glad to hear this and exclaimed, 'Bring those fruits and offer them to Sri Guru Maharaj'. According to his directions fruits were washed and offered along with the sweets and this gave him immense satisfaction.

Swami Ramakrishnananda wanted the young inmates to be very punctual and particular in their duties at the shrine and services to Sri Guru Maharaj. To a new Brahmacharin he told with a firmness of tone that was peculiar to him, "Look here, my boy; don't consider that as a mere picture of the Master. He is actually present here. Try to feel his living presence and serve him accordingly." This the Swami would constantly impress upon the minds of the inmates of the Math in season and out of season, that the Master abides in his spiritual body in the shrine, and the monastery was the House of God and therefore everything of the monastery belonged to Him and all their activities were direct services to Him. He exhorted all to believe in this truth and live accordingly. Of course he himself practised what he taught. Whenever he stood before the picture of the Master and repeated sonorously '*Jai Guru!*' '*Jai Guru!*' the feeling of the living presence of God would be so deeply impressed upon the minds of others that it could be better felt than described.

Sri Ramakrishna was to Swami Ramakrishnananda God Himself in human form and the living embodiment of all gods and goddesses. On the first day of one *Navaratri* he asked a Brahmacharin if he knew how to chant the *Chandi*. On his replying in the affirmative he was highly pleased and asked him to chant it every morning before Sri Ramakrishna in the ceremonial way all the nine days of the sacred *Navaratri*. The Brahmacharin was immensely delighted to have been given this task and commenced the sacred work in right earnest. In the evening of the sixth day of the *Navaratri* Swami Ramakrishnananda himself performed the *adhivasa* to Sri Ramakrishna in the usual way as it is done to the earthen image of the goddess Durga in Bengal. On the subsequent three days he did the ritual worship of the Divine Mother Durga and concluded the whole ceremony on the ninth day with the performance of the *homa*. The ceremonial worship of the goddess Durga was followed in every detail yet all was done to the picture of Sri Ramakrishna. Rightly the scriptures say that the Guru is Vishnu, Brahma and Shiva; nay, He is the Para Brahman from whom all gods and goddesses appear.

Swami Ramakrishnananda was found to be intoxicated with the greatest bliss on the celebration day of the birth-anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna. That day he was surrounded by devotees from all classes of the people of the society. In his ardour of devotion he would rise up and dance in divine ecstasy like a young boy clapping his hands in joy and singing hymns in praise of the Lord. He danced on such occasions with such ecstatic devotion that it inspired others to participate in the dance and forget the world. He would continue to dance for hours together with untiring enthusiasm until perspiration dripped profusely from his bulky body. In that ecstatic mood his face shone with a divine radiance and his person emanated a rosy halo as of an angel.

Though the Swami was a Vedantin of a high order yet like a staunch Vaishnavite he believed in the purifying effect of *prasad.* He was of opinion that whosoever should partake of the prasad of Sri Ramakrishna would be purified of all sins and blessed with devotion and faith. He got sugar candy or coconut laddus offered and kept ready as *prasad* for distribution among all visitors without distinction. Even a cooly who carried a load to the Math was not deprived of his privilege. Every visitor was given by him the blessing of the Master in the form of the prasad.

Swami Ramakrishnananda preached his Master's message without favour or fear of any body. Through his classes and lectures he inspired youngmen of Madras with the ideals of renunciation and service. At the top of his voice he proclaimed that religious life is impossible without the renunciation of lust and lucre. This made a few big-wigs of the city nervous. They feared that their youths upon whom many a family built their hopes would give up the world and become monks. They therefore implored the Swami to change the note of his teaching otherwise they would withdraw their support. This threat of the rich made the Swami awfully indignant. In this connection he was heard to say in a private talk, "Am I to preach other than what I learnt from my Master? Certainly I won't do that. I don't care a fig for the big-wigs. They are at liberty to do whatever they like. If I am ousted today from this castle I shall very gladly find accommodation in a portico of one of my students' houses and do the work of the Lord. I am a sannyasin and do not know where my next meal would come from."

In his lecture on 'Sri Ramakrishna and his Mission' delivered at Madras in 1900 the Swami observes that Sri Ramakrishna incomparably combined in himself the sweetly amiable and divinely naive nature of Sri Rama with the keen sagacity and profound wisdom of Sri Krishna. This seems to reiterate the Master's own proclamation on his death bed that He Who came as Rama and Krishna has incarnated as Sri Ramakrishna.

While describing the boyhood of the Master he observes in that lecture that the Master's poetic turn of mind was then so much impressed with the beautiful representations of Sri Brindaban, and the melting incidents connected therewith, made by the strolling players and rural narrators of Puranic stories, that he lived, moved, and had his being, as it were, in that blessed land the greatest part of his life, just as John Bunyan is said to have been constantly living and moving in an apocalyptical atmosphere. The Swami narrates in that address this interesting incident of the Master's boyhood not known to many. In the year 1853 when Sri Ramakrishna was 17 years old he copied a portion of the 'Yuddha Kanda' of the Bengali Ramayana wherein the date of its completion is mentioned. The copy is carefully preserved in the monastery at Belur. He adds therein that during those years of his spiritual practices the Master's body was merged in divine glory and radiated celestial lustre, and such was the beauty of his person then, that people used to look at him with wonder. The Swami concludes the lecture on the Master and his mission with these words, "According to him we must combine orthodoxy with liberalism. The spirit of the age is such as refuses to think that Truth can be the monopoly of a single individual or nation. Science has taught us this grandest lesson and so in Sri Ramakrishna we see the marriage of religion with science. Sri Ramakrishna represents Truth, and Truth is not bound by time or space. So the great Saint of the modern age is not limited temporally or spatially and his life is destined to shine through all men and women of the world in the near future.

In a Bengali article entitled *Ramakrishna Tattwabhasa*, contributed to the '*Udbodhan*', the Bengali periodical of the order, he gives an idea of the gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. He was never tired of telling of his Master and his message. Being in close contact with and loving service of the Master for the last three years of his life Swami Ramakrishnananda realised that Sri Ramakrishna was not only a great saint but an Incarnation of God. He testifies in that article that the Master's illiteracy and burning renunciation were clear proofs of his Godhood. "In the Modern age" the Swami observes in that article, "in order to be recognised as a learned man one had to take recourse to books. The more books one peruses the more learned he is called. It is not too much to say that Sri Ramakrishna had no book-learning. He used to call a *grantha* (book) a *granthi* (a knot, a bondage) for in most cases book learning gives rise to egoism, and thereby drags the mind into the pit of worldliness. He earnestly advised one of his disciples not to attach more importance to book-reading than to *guruseva* and spiritual practice. The Upanishads teach that learning is of two kinds, superior and inferior. Inferior learning of which Sri Ramakrishna had almost nothing is gained through reading books. Even the knowledge of the Vedas and the scriptures belongs to this category. But the superior learning of which Sri Ramakrishna was a Master leads one to the realization of God. Taking shelter at the feet of the Master we understood what superior learning (*paravidya*) is. By sheer powers of this *vidya* he could remove the veil of ignorance from the minds of the educated and the illiterate. Such a phenomenon is nowhere seen or heard. This proves beyond doubt that Sri Ramakrishna was God-Incarnate." Going on to give another proof of his Master's Godhood the Swami writes in conclusion as follows: "He had no egoism at all. He could seldom utter these two words 'I' and 'My'. In those cases where people use these two pronouns he would place his palm on his breast and say 'Here'. As his own ego was totally obliterated the cosmic 'I' of God took hold of him and manifested itself through him. The Divine Mother Kali is incarnated in Sri Ramakrishna to grant Jnana and Bhakti to men and women of this age."

In the course of a lecture[2] on the message of the Master the Swami observes, "After analysing the various religions of the world we see that, although they proceed from different personalities and may apparently differ, they all lead to the same goal. Similarly the one God has several names, Isvara, Vishnu, Allah, etc. This is what has been realised by Sri Ramakrishna Deva." The concluding remarks of the lecture which are very instructive are as follows: "Born as we are in such a grand, universal religion it is our duty to regard other religions as we regard our own. Our religion includes the religious experiences and the religious consciousness of the whole world throughout all times. Hence, only by honouring all religions can we be true Hindus. But it is better for a man to die in the religion in which he is born than to leave it and take up another religion. We must not go against the grain of our nature, for nature has been described as a kindly mother who gradually leads the baby to the goal. To go against her would be committing the worst of all blunders. This is what has been preached by Sri Ramakrishna Deva. He has asked the Christian to be a true Christian, the Mahommedan to be a true Mahommedan, the Visishtadvaitin to be a true Visishtadvaitin, the Advaitin to be a true Advaitin. He says, "Whosoever is true to his own religion will ultimately reach God."

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[2] Published in his book '*Universe and Man*'

In order to explain the various conceptions of God held by different religious schools the Swami quotes in his Sanskrit lecture, delivered at Mysore, his Master's homely saying: "Just as a chameleon changes its colour according to its own sweet will and sometimes becomes colourless, so does the Lord reveal Himself in various forms out of His grace for his devotees." After establishing the conclusion that all religions are but different ways of God-realisation he then explained the necessity of Sri Ramakrishna's advent, concluding, "When our religion lost its sympathetic spirit, the Lord incarnated Himself as Sri Ramakrishna who embodies the true spirit of Hinduism and has clearly shown its universality and immortality."

CHAPTER XII

UNIQUE LOVE FOR THE BROTHER DISCIPLES

I

THE Scriptural injunction goes that a brother disciple should be looked upon as the Guru. It signifies that without a genuine love for one's fellow disciples, one's devotion to the Guru can never reach perfection. A unique manifestation of love for his fellow disciples, was abundantly seen in Swami Ramakrishnananda. The love and esteem in which he held his fellow disciples, in particular Swamis Vivekananda, Brahmananda and Premananda, almost bordered on worship. He first became intimate with Swami Vivekananda at Dakshineswar, at the feet of the Master. They were then of the same age but he came to regard the words of Swami Vivekananda as those of his Guru. We find a striking instance of this unquestioning acceptance in an incident which occured just after Swami Vivekananda's return from the west. He had taken a vow not to desert the sacred relics of his beloved Master, which he had been worshipping for over a decade in the monastery at Baranagore and Alambazar. But at the behest of Swami Vivekananda he threw his vow to the winds and went away without a murmur to Madras to found a monastery there.

In 1899, Swami Vivekananda halted at Madras, along with Swami Turiyananda during his second voyage to the West. When the ship reached the Madras harbour, quarantine regulations, owing to the plague epidemic in Calcutta at the time, prevented the ingress or egress of visitors and passengers. The steamer lay at anchor far from the wharf and the friends and devotees who had gathered in large numbers to meet the Swamis, went in small boats to the sides of the ship. Swami Ramakrishnananda had prepared with his own hands several sweets and other delicious dishes which, he knew, were to the liking of the Swamis. He took them with him and along with a few devotees went in a boat near the steamer. Swami Vivekananda leaned over the parapet of the deck and talked with Swami Ramakrishnananda who was in the boat. When it was time to return to the shore Swami Ramakrishnananda said to a devotee who was with him in the boat, "Please ask the boatman to take us right round the steamer. Let us at least make a circumambulation round the two great souls whose feet we have not been able to touch to-day." And this was done.

Once Swami Ramakrishnananda went from Madras to Ernakulam where he was accommodated in the house of a prominent lawyer named Doraiswami Iyer. Swami Vivekananda had stayed in this house during his visit to Ernakulam in his itinerant days. As soon as Swami Ramakrishnananda stepped into the house he wished to see first the exact place or room where his beloved fellow disciple had stayed. Mr. Iyer replied, "He sat here even where we are standing now." At once Swami Ramakrishnananda rolled on the floor and kissed the ground saying, "This is a *tirtham*, a holy place." Similary in Madras and other places too, wherever he heard that Swami Vivekananda had halted, he used to bow down at the sight of those places as he would at a shrine.

One summer morning in Madras Swami Ramakrishnananda returned from his class at about 10-30 A. M. in a jutka. After entering his room at the monastery he put off his dress and sitting on the edge of his cot alone began to fan himself. Seeing him perspire on account of excessive heat a Brahmachari fanned him from behind. After a minute or two, the Swami threw away his fan and clenching his fist at an imaginary figure exclaimed, "It is for you that I suffer so much. See, how painful is my suffering." But the next moment he prostrated himself on the carpet with folded palms saying, "No brother, no brother. Excuse me, excuse me. What you have done is perfectly right." Then he got up with beaming countenance and took his seat again. All this was addressed to Swami Vivekananda, who it was that had sent him to Madras for the work of Sri Ramakrishna.

Once a Swami, who is still living, saw Swami Ramakrishnananda at Madras praying fervently on his knees before an oil painting of Swami Vivekananda saying, "O my beloved brother, thou art verily the true representative of the Master and it is thou who sent me over here to propagate his message. I am only carrying out thy commands. I beseech thee to see that no pride of self-esteem enters my heart or no thirst for name and fame peeps into my mind. All the burden and responsibility that thou hast placed on me are verily thine. Bless me that I may work out the Mission of our Master as an instrument in His hands and that I may offer all the fruits of my work unto Him. Guide me always in the right path." This is no doubt a typical example of his complete consecration to the Master and His Mission. Before the news of Swami Vivekananda's passing away reached Swami Ramakrishnananda in Madras, he had a supernatural experience. On the very night the Swami passed away, as Swami Ramakrishnananda sat in meditation a familiar voice rang out clearly: "Sashi, Sashi, I have spat out the body." Swami Ramakrishnananda at once recognised the familiar voice as that of his beloved brother and understood its sad significance. But he derived great solace in his bereavement from this psychic phenomenon which showed how the two spiritual brothers were inseparably bound in eternal love.

The following hymn in Sanskrit which was composed by Swami Ramakrishnananda and chanted on the 49th birthday anniversary of Swami Vivekananda held at Madras on the 29th January, 1911 very well of expresses the noble sentiments the learned composer cherished for his illustrious brother. This hymn, which is said to have been composed at Madras on 28th January, 1911, is the last composition of Swami Ramakrishnananda.

श्रीमद्विवेकानन्दपञ्चकम् ॥

अनित्यदृश्येषु विविच्य नित्यं तस्मिन् समाधत्त इह स लीलया ।
विवेकवैराग्यविशुद्धचित्तं योऽसौ विवेकी तमहं नमामि ॥ १ ॥

विवेकजानन्दनिमग्नचित्तं विवेकदानैकविनोदशीलम् ।
विवेकभासा कमनीयकान्तिं विवेकिनं तं सततं नमामि ॥ २ ॥

ऋतं च विज्ञानमधिश्रयद् यन्निरन्तरं चादिमध्यान्तहीनम् ।
सुखं सुरूपं प्रकरोति यस्य आनन्दमूर्तिं तमहं नमामि ॥ ३ ॥

सूर्यो यथान्धं हि तमो निहन्ति विष्णुर्यथा दुष्टजनांश्छिनत्ति ।
तथैव यस्याखिलनेत्रलोभं रूपं त्रितापं विमुखीकरोति ॥ ४ ॥

तं देशिकेन्द्रं परमं पवित्रं विश्वस्य पात्रं मधुरं यतीन्द्रम् ।
हिताय नृणां नरमूर्तिमन्तं "विवेक-आनन्द" महं नमामि ॥ ५ ॥

नमः श्रीयतिराजाय विवेकानन्दसूरये ।
सच्चित्सुखस्वरूपाय स्वामिने तापहारिणे ॥

TRANSLATION

1. To him, who, sifting out the Eternal from the transitory phenomena of this world, made it his sport to concentrate thereon his mind, purified by discrimination and renunciation, that discriminating soul I salute.

2. To him whose mind was immersed in the bliss that comes of discrimination, whose nature delighted solely in kindling discrimination in others, and whose grace was made beautiful by the glow of discrimination, to that discriminating soul my salutations ever go.

3. To him in whose graceful form, truth and knowledge had their abode, and which imparts a joy incessant, without beginning or end, to that embodiment of bliss I bow.

4. Verily as the sun dispels the blinding darkness, as the Lord Vishnu destroys the wicked ones, in exactly the same manner he whose handsome appearance, the cynosure of all eyes, drives away the threefold misery of life—

5. To that Teacher of teachers, supremely pure, the guardian of the world, the lovable, the prince of Yogins, who took up the human form for the good of mankind, to that Vivekananda I bow.

I salute that king of renouncers, the sage, Vivekananda, who was of the essence of *Satchidananda*, the Lord, the remover of distress.

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It may be mentioned here that Swami Ramakrishnananda has also rendered into Bengali verse Swami Vivekananda's Sanskrit hymn entitled '*Ambastotra*.'

Swami Ramakrishnananda not only deeply loved Swami Brahmananda but also regarded him as the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna, and as such made no distinction between them. He seems to have surprised all his brother disciples in his profound love for Swami Brahmananda. Swami Brahmananda went to Madras at the earnest solicitation of Swami Ramakrishnananda in 1908, when Sister Devamata of the Boston Vedanta Centre was there. Swami Ramakrishnananda requested Devamata to go to town and make certain purchases for the venerable guest. When he had finished enumerating the requirements he asked her abruptly, " Sister, what do you think of our President ? " Her reply was, " I think he is very wonderful ; but I am a little afraid of him." Swami Ramakrishnananda leaned forward in his chair and whispered, " So am I ".[1]

When Swami Brahmananda arrived in Madras towards the end of 1908, Swami Ramakrishnananda accommodated him in his own room which was renovated specially for the purpose. Then he said, " Guru Maharaj and his son will stay inside. I will stay out in the entrance hall and serve them. What more do I want ?" He did his best to make Maharaj happy there in every respect. He was often seen to bow unobserved at the entrance to the room wherein Swami Brahmananda stayed. So profound was his reverence for his dear brother disciple. Soon after Swami Brahmananda's arrival, a well-known citizen of Madras V. Krishnaswami Iyer, asked Swami Ramakrishnananda whether it would be convenient for the new Swami to deliver a lecture there. Swami Ramakrishnananda smilingly replied, " What is there in lectures ? He never gives lectures. Men such as he can impart religion by a mere look or a touch."

Some time later Swami Brahmananda, accompanied by Swami Ramakrishnananda, went on a pilgrimage to Rameswaram. Both the Swamis were accommodated in a first-class compartment of the train and four young Swamis with a devotee were in another. On the way to Rameswaram they halted at Madura for three days. The

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[1] Vide *Days in an Indian Monastery*. P. 33.

Swamis visited the temple at Madura and saw the image of Sri Meenakshi Devi. In the temple Swami Brahmananda had a wonderful vision that the living image of the Mother was moving towards him. Swami Ramakrishnananda had to hold on to his brother disciple there for nearly an hour in the midst of a large crowd, and was himself all the while in an ecstatic mood. He then shed tears and sang the Mother's glory over and over again by chanting this couplet from the Chandi:

सर्वमङ्गलमङ्गल्ये शिवे सर्वार्थसाधिके
शरण्ये त्र्यम्बके गौरि नारायणि नमोऽस्तु ते ॥

सृष्टिस्थितिविनाशानां शक्तिभूते सनातनि
गुणाश्रयेऽगुणमये नारायणि नमोऽस्तु ते ॥

" O three-eyed Gouri, consort of Narayana, Thou art the embodiment of all good, the bestower of all blessings, the refuge of all. Salutation unto Thee, O consort of Narayana, Eternal One, Thou art the root of all creation, preservation and destruction of the world. In Thee rest the gunas, Thyself beyond their pale. Saluation unto Thee."

When Swami Ramakrishnananda came out of the shrine to the outer hall he saw the image of Adi Sankara and longed to touch the feet of the image with his head. But the priests would not allow him to do so. Nevertheless he pushed them aside saying, " Who can prevent my worshipping the Great One?" He went near the image and fulfilled his heart's desire.[2]

The Swamis stayed in Rameswaram for three days and put up in the local palace of the Raja of Ramnad, a disciple of Swami Vivekananda. But before going to the palace, both the brother monks drove in a double-bullock coach to the temple.

The following two instances show how the least displeasure on the part of Swami Brahmananda was an unbearable agony to Swami

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[2] Vide the article of Rao Saheb C. Ramaswami Aiyengar in *Vedanta Kesari* for August, 1928.

Ramakrishnananda, giving him no rest until he begged his fellow-disciple's forgiveness with the utmost humility. When Swami Brahmananda was in Madras in 1908, he asked a familiar devotee to procure for him a picture of a South Indian dancing girl. The Swami wanted to send the picture to one of his disciples in Bengal who was a moral wreck. His idea was that every time the disciple would look at the girls picture he would be reminded of his Guru and this holy remembrance would drive away the impure thoughts from his mind. The devotee, who was ignorant of this noble intention of the Swami, however, brought the picture the next evening as desired, and asked Swami Ramakrishnananda if he knew anything about it. The latter was equally in the dark and felt that whatever might be the object, if the visitors to the Math should see it or hear of it, they were sure to misunderstand him. So he took the picture from the devotee and told him not to mention anything about it to Swami Brahmananda till he made enquiries about it again. Soon after, Swami Brahmananda enquired of the devotee about the picture and the latter confessed that he had handed it over to Swami Ramakrishnananda. It was evident that he did not approve of the devotee's action or of Swami Ramakrishnananda's interference. After this whenever Swami Ramakrishnananda came to Swami Brahmananda the latter would turn aside his face and would not talk to him. After a few days the latter called for the almanac to choose a day for departure. This was unbearable for Swami Ramakrishnananda who rushed into his room and lay prostrate before him saying, " Pray, be not angry with me. I am an unworthy and insignificant servant. At a mere nod of your head, a hundred Sashis can be called forth." At once the face of Swami Brahmananda was lit up with a smile and the cloud of misunderstanding disappeared and Swami Ramakrishnananda was again happy and joyous like a child. The picture was of course handed over to Swami Brahmananda.[3]

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[3] Vide Rao Sahib C. Ramaswami, Aiyengar's article, 'Swami Ramakrishnananda,' in *Vedanta Kesari* Sept. 1930, pp. 180.

The *Inspired Talks* of Swami Vivekananda was published from the Math at Madras when Swami Brahamananda was there. Swami Brahmananda became interested in the publication and gave suggestions as to how its sale could be pushed forward. A senior Swami was entrusted with the work of sending copies of the same to the newspapers for review. One suggestion of Swami Brahmananda was to send a copy to the *Hindu* of Madras and after the review appeared in that daily to send another copy to the *Bombay Chronicle* with a copy of the *Hindu* review enclosed. Swami Brahmananda and Swami Ramakrishnananda however differed on this point. The latter begged that the review copies to both the dailies be sent at the same time independently of each other. While discussion on this point was going on, Swami Brahmananda suddenly withdrew his suggestion and said, " Well, well, you are in charge of this Math, and you are a scholar. It is all your business. I see it was wrong on my part to interfere in this matter." Saying this he became absolutely indifferent in this and other internal affairs of the Math. He forthwith took a post card and dictated a letter to a friend at Puri fixing the date of his departure from Madras. Swami Ramakrishnananda somehow kept quiet for a day or two, but could not bear the indifference of his beloved brother any more. Then one morning he approached Swami Brahmananda with folded hands and kneeling before him said, "Maharaj, I have fallen from your grace. If you do not bestow your blessings upon me, who will? What am I without your grace? Men like me may be created by the score out of mere dust by your wish. Will you not forgive me?" Then both the brothers were reconciled and everything went on as before.

During Swami Brahmananda's stay in Madras Swami Ramakrishnananda was seen every evening after *aratrikam* regularly prostrating himself before his beloved brother. He personally attended to all his comforts and often exhorted the young monks to serve him with devotion, saying, " Remember always that by serving him you can truly serve Sri Ramakrishna and easily attain the *summum bonum* of life, without any austerities whatsoever. In him our Master shines forth in full glory and splendour and through him he is looking after the well-being of our Sangha." One day a devotee brought some fruits to be offered to the Lord but Swami Ramakrishnananda offered them to Swami Brahmananda instead and told the devotee that the Master had accepted his offering through him, and his objects were fulfilled.

Swami Ramakrishnananda once strongly desired that Swami Brahmananda must be asked to worship Sri Ramakrishna in the shrine at least once, so that the living presence of the Master might be invoked in the shrine 'for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many.' But he found no opportunity to convey that request to Swami Brahmananda. One day while Swami Brahmananda was passing by the shrine after bath, he stood before him with outstretched arms and importuned him to enter the shrine and worship the Master. Swami Brahmananda first objected on the ground that he was not in the habit of doing ritual worship. But at last he had to yield to the earnest importunities of his loving brother, and entering the shrine conducted the worship. When he was conducting it, Swami Ramakrishnananda quietly closed the door of the shrine so that the former might not be disturbed in any way.

Swami Brahmananda too loved Swami Ramakrishnananda very deeply. To a new comer at the Madras Math in 1909, the former said, "Here you will be in the company of a saint. Serve him and you will attain everything." When Swami Paramananda joined the Order Swami Brahmananda sent him to Swami Ramakrishnananda saying, "Stay with Swami Ramakrishnananda three years and everything will be achieved. Your character will be well formed. Nothing more will be necessary."

Swami Premananda who was designated by the Master as an eternally perfect soul, was very highly respected by Swami Ramakrishnananda. Here are the latter's observations about the former: "There is Baburam.[4] He is the store-house of infinite spirituality; but he won't manifest it." The company of the brother disciple, however short, was so pleasant to Swami Ramakrishnananda that he missed no opportunity to avail himself of it. By the end of 1906, Swami Premananda accompanied his mother on a pilgrimage to Rameswaram, and on the way halted a few days at Madras. As his mother was with him he could not put up in the local monastery but was accommodated in a separate house near by. Swami Ramakrishnananda spent those nights in that house with his dear brother disciple in spite of inconveniences and joined him on his pilgrimage to Conjeevaram, Pakshitirtha and to Rameswaram.

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[4] Swami Premananda's former name.

While Swami Ramakrishnananda lay in his death-bed at Calcutta, Swami Premananda visited him frequently from the Belur Math. For some days he could not come as his two fingers were injured while cutting fodder for the cows of the monastery. Swami Ramakrishnananda, knowing the cause of Swami Premananda's absence, scolded the young Brahmacharins waiting on him, saying, " Baburam is a living representative of the Master. You young Brahmacharins do not do these things and he had to do them. Serve him and you will be saved." One day Swami Premananda brought some fruit on a plate and placing it before Swami Ramakrishnananda who was bed-ridden asked him to eat of it. The latter could not eat from the plate and entreated his beloved brother to feed him with his hands—hands which had become blessed by serving the Master. When Swami Premananda did so, Swami Ramakrishnananda expressed profound satisfaction and said, " This is what I expect from you brother dear."

Swami Ramakrishnananda realised that the Master actually lived in his disciples. It is this realisation that inspired him to love and serve his brother monks with such zeal and fervour. He was a typical example of true discipleship and his life clearly showed that the love for the brother disciples was a sure expression of sincere devotion to the Guru.

CHAPTER XIII

AS A MONK

A DEVOTEE who came into intimate contact with Swami Ramakrisnananda and had many opportunities of seeing him at close quarters during the last fifteen years of his life observes: " What a supreme control he had over the senses and what a worthy representative he was of the most ancient Order of monks in the world, I cannot adequately describe! He was one of those great souls who form the salt of mankind."

Swami Ramakrishnananda was indeed a monk of the highest type. In the midst of tremendous activity and public life he lived the life of an ideal monk. Though surrounded by men, he was alone. He was always enveloped in an atmosphere of loneliness, which was not created by lack of companionship, but by unconditional detachment. The few intervals of actual solitude he had, were at early dawn or during the quiet hours of the night. There was a constant coming and going of men in the monastery hall where he sat. Members of the Math moved back and forth. Visitors came and talked and went. Devotees brought offerings of fruits or vegetables. Therefore solitary moments were rare in the day, yet he seemed alone and insulated. His decisive reply to a devotee's passing reference to it was: "I am full of God; what need have I of any one else ?" His analysis was, "Aloneness means singleness, purity. It also means fearlessness. When there are two there is fear. In reality, fearlessness exists where there is only one. Since we cannot be happy so long as we fear, we shall not be able to find peace, until we can say, I am alone, I need nothing". This shows how his being was in complete contact with God.

The Swami was rarely heard to voice a personal like or dislike. His judgements were formed by their relation to an ideal. They were never measured by the reaction a person or object created in his mind. The whole fervour of his being flowed out when he talked of God or his Master. For earthly things he showed something akin to unconcern. Even the beauties of Nature did not always move him. One evening when a devotee tried to draw his attention to an unusually wonderful sunset, his response was, "This is the hour when one should think of God, not of His creation." This insensibility to earthly beauty arose from his intense inwardness. His mind was centred in divine beauty. That alone was real to him, as to all true monks. "What are the Himalayas?", he exclaimed once, "Just rock piled on rock. Look at all this outside, the solar system, and what will there be? The earth in the vastnesses of heavens is only a minute point. What can be anything on it? The only reality in this universe is God."

The Swami lived and moved and like an orthodox monk and adhered rigidly to the religious traditions throughout his life. He used to quote often Sankara's couplet—

भगवद्गीता किञ्चिदधीता गङ्गाजललवकणिका पीता ।
सकृदपि यस्य मुरारिसमर्चा तस्य यमः किं कुरुते चर्चाम् ॥

'How can death frighten one who has read a little of the Bhagavadgita and drunk but a few drops of the Ganges water?' Swami Ramakrishnananda not only believed but practised lifelong Swami Vivekananda's declaration that the Gita and the Ganges constitute the Hinduism of the Hindus. When the Swami first came to Madras he had not brought Ganges water with him for worship and longed to have it at the earliest opportunity. In 1899 when Swami Vivekananda went on his second voyage to the West he carried a fairly big earthenware jar full of Ganges water for his brother disciple at Madras. Swami Ramakrishnananda's regard for the Gita was equally exemplary. The Swami made a point of chanting its verses regularly every morning. He would never miss it inspite of inconveniences. In his Bengali work, '*Life of Sri Ramanuja*', what he records as Alavandar's attitude to the Gita was his own too. He observes: "Let urgent business remain or not, I have learnt that the reading of the Gita is the most meritorious, and glorious of all actions. Recitation of the Gita should be attended to first. How can he who has enjoyed and understood for a time at least the cardinal truths of the Gita be attracted by the paltry things of the world? Really to enjoy the sweetness of the Gita one should possess the force of Bhakti and the untained devotion of a pure heart. Nevertheless even the mere repetition of the holy words that fell from the lips of Bhagavan Sri Krishna cannot be without efficacy. It will surely arouse in the reader an unfailing sense of purity and devotion."

Swami Ramakrishnananda came to Puri from Madras to see Swami Brahmananda. One day he took a Brahmacharin with him to the temple of Lord Jagannath for *darsan*. After the *darsan* he said to the Brahmacharin, "Look here. One should buy some *prasad* from the '*ananda bazaar*' and partake of it." Saying this he went to the bazaar and brought the prasad of rice and dal in a pot-sherd. Then he stretched out his hand to the Brahmacharin and said, "Take from it and eat." He held the pot-sherd in the left hand and was eating from it with the right. The Brahmacharin hesitated saying, "You take it now. I shall take it afterwards." But the Swami insisted saying, "In this place of Jagannath it is the custom for all to sit together and eat the prasad from the same pot. Some people feed others with their own hands." So the Brahmacharin had to eat from his hand there. Another day he gave a little dry *mahaprasad* of Lord Jagannath to a devotee at Madras and said, "From very ancient times Puri is considered a sacred place. It is a *Jnana-bhumi*. In the sacred shrine at Puri there is no difference between man and man. Brahmins and pariahs eat prasad there sitting together. Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna used to give this prasad along with sweets to Swami Vivekananda, with the blessing, "May this *prasad* give you Bhakti." The Master said that this *prasad* should be considered as sacred as Brahman." Swami Ramakrishnananda gave a little of the same *prasad* to the devotee to be taken home. The devotee treasured this for many years with devotion and daily took a grain of it.

The Swami was keen on the scrupulous observance of religious customs. For example, he would never begin a piece of important work without consulting the almanac; he would never undertake a journey on certain days or *tithis* and he attached great importance seemingly to omens, signs, and premonitions. When engaged in writing the biography of Ramanuja in Bengali he visited Conjeevaram and Sriperumbudur and collected from various sources interesting stories and incidents relating to the life of the Vaishanavite Saints. When he learnt of the significance attached to the medicinal herb named *Thoothuvalai* as a *sattvic* food and the part it played in leading to the renunciation of Yamunacharya he took a great liking for it. He planted it in the Math compound at Madras, tended it with care and made it an article of his diet. A monk of the monastery mistook the plant for an ordinary weed and uprooted it one day. This made the Swami very sorry. Like his Master the Swami held that these orthodox religious observances were like the chaff over the grain and were very necessary to preserve the vitality of religion.

Swami Ramakrishnananda's profound devotion carried him with irresistible force to complete surrender. He surrendered himself fully to God and never was there a more willing captive. Surrender meant to him the culminating triumph of all spiritual effort. "Sri Krishna and other great teachers have taught many different ways of going to God, but in the end they threw all aside and said simply: 'Have complete self-surrender.' Without absolute self-abnegation no one can realise God. You must know that of yourself you can do nothing. Until you recognise this, the realisation of God will not come. If a man is able to see things as they should be seen and to analyse himself properly he will understand that he is in the hands of a higher Power." Then he says: "When man's vanity is puffed up by name, fame, importance, and wealth, he has no hope to reach Thee, O Lord. Thou comest to those who have none else to call their own. Thou belongest to the poor, the lowly, to those who have nothing in this world. Come to me, O Lord. All I have is Thine, it never was mine. Thou art all my wealth."

Self-surrender was a favourite theme with Swami Ramakrishnananda. He recurred to it constantly and whenever he talked on it his words burnt deep into the heart. A spiritual fruition would come, he believed, only to him who had the desire and the power to surrender himself wholly to God. All must be given if all was to be received. "Man is too often afraid to surrender." He said to a devotee, one evening, "He thinks he will lose something; but one never loses when he gives oneself absolutely to God. Only when he is guided by God does he cease to blunder; because God then works through his hands, sees through his eyes, speaks with his tongue, and he becomes a perfect instrument in the hand of God. He is directed by God in everything.[1]"

In the early autumn of 1908 Swami Ramakrishnananda had gone to Puri to escort from there Swami Brahmananda to Madras. At the station an incident[2] occurred which revealed anew his surrender to God. Through a misunderstanding no berth had been reserved for him in the train. With great difficulty an upper berth was made available in a compartment which had already two Englishmen in it. A person of Swami Ramakrishnananda's size and weight in a lightly-built upper berth meant no little peril for the one who slept beneath and the English trevellers did not hesitate to talk of it with rude frankness. Swami Ramakrishnananda, however, paid no heed to their uncharitable remarks, sat cross-legged on the long seat of the railway carriage, and rocked slowly back and forth with a smile of calm unconcern on his face. In reply to a comment from one of the friends who had come to see him off he said quietly, "Do not mind. The Divine Mother will take care of me."

The time for the departure of the train arrived and the station bell was rung. But the train did not move! Five, ten, fifteen, twenty minutes passed, still the train stood still! Then the station-master came running down the platform crying out "Engine derailed! Go to track number five!" He stopped to say to Swami Ramakrishnananda: "I have got a good place for you. Wait a moment." On his return he led the Swami to a single first-class compartment. As Swami Ramakrishnananda stepped into it he said to Devamata with the same quiet smile, "I told you, sister, that the Divine Mother would look after me."

The monastic spirit was uppermost in the mind of the Swami. He was very particular in preserving a spiritual atmosphere always around him. He did not let any one forget the sanctity of the monastery. He did not allow any political discussion or newspaper reading in the Math. More than once when a visitor took out a newspaper and began to read, the Swami was heard to say to him, "Pray, put away your paper, you can read that anywhere. When you come here you should think of God and talk about religious matters." He did not hesitate to give a drastic rebuke when he felt it would be beneficial. Once a bombastic pundit came full of plans for reforming temples, schools and society in general Swami Ramakrishnananda gave him a patient hearing and then quietly observed, "I wonder what God did before you were born!" This sharp reply silenced the man at once. A really helpful conversation followed and he went away enlightened by a talk with the Swami.

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[1] Vide Sister Devamata's article *Swami Ramakrishnananda, Sannyasin and Teacher*, in *Vedanta Kesari* for February, 1933.

The monastery at Madras is on the road to Adyar where the headquarters of the Theosophical Society is situated. Many Theosophists used to stop at the Math to see Swami Ramakrishnananda. They showed great reverence for him and held many interesting talks with him. One day one of them broached the subject of the *Mahatmas* in whom they believe. Several others were present and a discussion went on. The Swami closed the topic with these incisive words, "If you want an invisible guide, why not take God?" This spontaneous remark was based on his personal realisation that God is the greatest guide of life. An American Theosophist who had come to India for study was brought to the monastery one day from Adyar. Something in the climate or different conditions of living affected his mind. He grew very morose and refused all food and drink. When all efforts to persuade him to take food failed they brought him to the Swami at the monastery, believing he might be helpful. In the holy company of the Swami his aversion for food left after a few days. He remained in the monastery for some time and gradually recovered. Then the Swami arranged to send him back to his home in Ohio, U. S. A.

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[2] Vide Sister Devamata's *Days in an Indian Monastery* (Pp. 145-6).

The monastic life of Swami Ramakrishnananda was characterised by total absence of egoism. He was always ready to admit his error even to a junior. Once he scolded Swami Paramananda for something he had not done. But the younger Swami remained silent. When Swami Ramakrishnananda discovered his error he was very distressed over it and took him to task for not justifying himself.

Inspite of possible imperfections Swami Ramakrishnananda held monks in general much higher in his estimation than the worldly people however devout. An old member of the Ramakrishna Order still living asked him once in the Belur Math about the spiritual state of any fallen monk. The Swami said, " One standing on the sea level looks at another climbing the Himalayas on a pilgrimage to Kedarnath and Badrinath. The pilgrim shall have to face ups and downs in his sacred march on the mountains. His apparent descents do not retard his progress but bring him only nearer to higher ascents till the destination is reached. On that account the on-looker from the plains should not judge him in bad light and think low of him. For the pilgrim marches ahead in spite of his apparent slips and falls, but the onlooker stands on the same level and lags behind the other hundereds of miles. In the lives of sincerely struggling souls lapses are not signs of forging new *samskaras* but of the working out of the old ones ; for the tying and untying of thread on a reel look alike from a distance."

Once a very wealthy gentleman of Madras City promised to contribute something to the local monastery. The Swami visited him several times along with a devotee in expectation of the fulfilment of his promise. But every time he put them off with some excuse or other, and the devotee who accompanied the Swami was annoyed. But the Swami on all occasions remained unruffled and would calmly say, " We have done our duty." During their last visit to the gentleman he curtly said, " Swamiji, you need not come here anymore. If it is possible for me to do anything I shall do it myself." The devotee with him was visibly perturbed at what he considered an insult to the Swami. But the Swami laid his hands on his soulders as they quietly withdrew and said, " Even silently if we bear any ill feeling towards him it may recoil on him and do him' harm. You ought not to think the less of him because of his unwillingness to contribute."

According to a Tantrik rite the animal that is immolated before the goddess Kali or Durga symbolises the egoism of the worshipper. Swami Ramakrishnananda had totally immolated his egoism at the feet of his Guru. As his egoism was obliterated the whims or follies of devotees could not offend him. A devotee from Triplicane once invited him for a meal at his house. He requested a Brahmacharin of the monastery also to accompany the Swami. On the fixed date the Swami, accompanied by a Brahmacharin, went to his house but was surprised to find that the door was bolted from inside. They knocked at the door and called aloud when an old lady came out to say that the owner was out. The Swami asked the lady to infrom him of their arrival if he was anywhere nearby. A boy was sent with the information and the gentleman turned up after a short while. He excused himself with much sorrow and humility and said, "O Swami, I forgot all about the invitation!" The Swami asked him very amiably to get some food for them from the nearest shop. He then partook of the food brought from the shop and returned. Another day the Swami was again invited and warmly entertained by the devotee.

The Swami did not allow even intimate devotees to interfere with the rigid rules of his monastic life. Sister Devamata, who by her extraordinary devotedness gained a soft corner in his heart, was not exempted from this reservation. The Swami never cared whether or no his clothing, bedding or room were tidy. While once he was away from the city for a few days, the Sister availed herself of this opportunity to do some service to him. She swept his room, tidied his clothes, put the bedding in the sun, and then nicely arranged them. On his return the Swami found his room quite neat and everything in order. But he was not at all pleased with this loving service of the devotee. Rather he considered her service a violation of a vow of his monastic life. He took her to task for touching the bed of a monk and warned her never to repeat the mistake.

By a penetrative insight born of spiritual illumination the Swami could see the inner nature of those who contacted him and treated them accordingly. One day a gentleman came to the monastery and very devotedly bowed before him touching both the big toes of his feet. The Swami did not like his touch and dismissed him forthwith saying, " Come one day and meet me in one of my classes in the city." After the gentleman left, the Swami got the Ganges water, sipped a little of it and sprinkled a little on his head. He then washed his feet with ordinary water as he felt a burning sensation in them from the gentleman's impure touch. While washing his feet he sympathetically observed, "I feel for the man; but none can do any thing for him unless he repents and earnestly prays to the Lord."

Only genuine and sincere people found favour in the eyes of Swami Ramakrishnananda. He had little sympathy with the pharisaical type of people who make a show of religion. For a time there was at the Madras Math a boy who was liked by some devotees for his pleasant disposition and friendly manner. The Swami was kind to him, and seldom rebuked him but accepted very little service from him. Devotees who wondered at this strange attitude of the Swami understood it only later. Early one morning the boy left the Math and did not return. He liked to meditate and not to work. Swami Ramakrishnananda smiled and said, "He will not go far in religious life. He is not sincere. When he claimed to be fasting he would slip off by himself and eat something; and when after his bath he was supposed to sit in meditation he would lie down on his mat and sleep. He thought I did not know. That way you cannot get on anywhere. You must be genuine if you want to advance in spiritual life. You may cheat a man for some time, but you cannot cheat God. Nor can you deceive the world for long. Your face, your tone, your manner will betray you."

A Bengali officer, holding a high post in the Accountant-General's Office at Madras, came to see the Swami one afternoon. The officer felt proud of his being a disciple of a western Guru and of learning the esoteric doctrine from her. The Swami indignantly said, "It seems we have to learn now-a-days everything from the Westerners! Of course, what we do not know we should learn from them, and adapt those things to our best advantage. It is regrettable that we are appallingly ignorant of what a wonderful and unique wealth of spiritual culture we have. But woe betide us if also we are to learn spirituality from the West!"

Swami Ramakrishnananda was a rare combination of orthodoxy and tolerance. Once he had occasion to go to Saidapet in response to an invitation for dinner by one of his students. Swami Paramananda and a devotee accompanied him. After partaking of dinner and taking rest they went towards the evening to St. Thomas Mount, not far away from Saidapet. They ascended the mound and saw a church on its summit. The Paster of the church who was informed of the Swami's desire to see its *sanctum sanctorum*, was courteous enough to open its gates. They all entered the church and to the amazement of all present, the Swami went straight upto the altar, knelt before it as a devout Christian would do, and prayed. The devotee's impression of the Swami prior to this incident was that he was an orthodox Hindu and possessed little or no respect for Christian churches. For, the Swami used to say, that what Vyasa, Yajnavalkya and Manu did and wrote were all correct and true, for they were men in whom not a vestige of selfishness could be found.

The Swami was a staunch supporter of all that was Hindu and could be found not infrequently to defend even some of its worst superstitions with the noble object of restoring and strengthening our tottering faith in our ancient Scriptures and Sages. For such a Swami to pray in a Christian church adopting a kneeling posture was inexplicable to the devotee. The Swami imbibed his Master's outlook which was at once orthodox and universal. This is the true attitude of a Hindu monk who in the words of Swami Ramakrishnananda should behave like a bee and never like a fly.

The Swami's heart was full of the nectar of kindness and forgiveness. One evening after returning from the class he espied a stranger sitting near the threshold of the Math. On enquiry he found that the man somehow fell in the company of the itinerant class of beggars called *vairagis* and on account of their intolerable treatment ran away from them to seek the Swami's protection. The Swami gave him shelter and in a few days thereafter admitted him as an inmate of the monastery. This man in whom a truant tendency still lingered decamped one day without the knowledge and permission of the Swami. When after some days he returned and repented of his bad conduct the Swami forgave him and readmitted him. Is it surprising to learn that under the burning influence of the Swami's spiritual life he gave up all his waywardness and was so transformed that he became a worthy monk of the Order?

While at Madras the Swami reduced the wants of the Math to the barest minimum. He was a monk of meditation accustomed to simplest possible living. He would often say that *Bhikshatanam* is the best for a sannyasin. In order to preserve the age-old custom of living on alms and to keep the vow of voluntary poverty ever alive in his monastic life he asked the young Brahmacharins to beg food for him from a few houses near the Math. Thus he trained the young men in humility and service and made them feel the glory of voluntary poverty. Many youths approached him to join the monastic life but he would admit no aspirants without testing them. The Scriptures rightly say that the path of monastic life is sharp as the edge of the razor, hard and difficult to tread. So he put the candidates to severe tests and found many unfit. Of course he gave chances to all of them but most of them ran away unable to bear the rigour and hardship of life in the monastery under him.

As a worthy member of the Hindu Order of monks he never tolerated disparaging remarks about such saints and sages as Manu, and Vyasa, but would hold a brief for all the traditions, customs and usages of Hinduism. His respect for Sankara, the founder of the Hindu monastic Order, was exceedingly great. When he was in Castle Kernan, a rich merchant, who used to frequent the Math, spoke once of Sankara irreverently. The Swami flared up and gave a home-thrust to him. Those who were present on the occasion thought that the merchant would withdraw the help he was giving to the Math and later on pointed it out to the Swami. The Swami said, "Let him withdraw if he will. Do you think the Lord's work depends on the mercy of men such as these?" A similar incident happened another time in Mylapore. The Swami was invited to a meeting held for the discussion of religious topics. In the course of the talk one of the organisers of the gathering happened to refer to Sankara in a slighting manner. The Swami could not brook the insult offered to the Acharya. He stood up and said, "I have no place where Sankara is not honoured" and quickly walked out.

How stern a monk Swami Ramakrishnananda was can be imagined from the two following incidents. Once Swami Dhyanananda was sent by him to the Brodies Road Post-Office which is situated near the Madras Math. After the postal errand was over, the junior Swami was detained by a talk with the Post-master. Swami Ramakrishnananda expected him back immediately as the work entrusted to him would take only a short time. He got impatient with the undue delay and hastened to the Post Office, and seeing the junior monk engaged in a talk with the Post-master took him to task then and there. On another occasion Swami Ramakrishnananda dictated a letter to the same junior Swami at the Madras Math. The former was seated on a chair and the latter on a stool before him. The letter was to be addressed to Port Blair, the chief town of the Andamans. While writing the superscription, the junior Swami omitted a word in hurry, though what he had written was enough for the safe passage of the letter to its destination. When the superscription was read out Swami Ramakrishnananda, noticing the omission, pushed the writer who fell down from the stool. The nib of the pen in the writer's hand pricked the feet of the senior Swami and the junior Swami unmindful of the push began to bandage the feet of his senior and while he was doing so, Swami Ramakrishnananda said softly to him, "If you obey implicity what we say your spiritual welfare is assured. Implicit obedience is essential in spiritual life. Do not exercise in spiritual matters your intelligence which is faulty and short-sighted. I knew well that what you had written was enough for the safe delivery of the letter. But in order to remove the discursiveness of your mind I punished you." His sternness was matched only by his profound love. The junior inmates of the Math were always objects of his fatherly love and care. At meals if he found a fruit or curry tasteful, or any preparation palatable he would heap the same on the plates of the juniors.

Swami Ramakrishnananda advised the young inmates of the Math to obliterate all memories of premonastic life and cut off all connections of the family for the sake of preserving the monastic spirit. Impressions of premonastic days are unhealthy for the spiritual life. Once Swami Paramananda went home to see his parents. When he returned from home he brought some new clothes and a silk wrapper presented to him by his parents. On his arrival at the Madras Math the senior Swami sent for Swami Paramananda and wanted him to produce the new clothes. He then asked him, " To whom has the silk wrapper been given?" Swami Paramananda said out of fear, "To you." The Swami took it for himself and instructed him to throw away the clothes given him by his parents. When the young Swami did as directed, the senior Swami said, " For the safety of monastic life all memories of home are to be wiped off. Unless this is done how can a monk look upon every home as his own and the whole humanity as his family ?"

Sri Ramakrishna had taught that the monastic ideal is founded on the total renunciation of wealth and women. Swami Ramakrishnananda literally followed this teaching of his Master. He never allowed women to be in his presence for more than a few minutes.

The Master could not touch money. If he happened to lay his hands upon any coin they would be contorted and he would get a burning pain like that of a scorpion sting. If coins were kept without his knowledge under his bed his breath would be suspended. So complete was his renunciation of wealth as a monk. Not only his mind but also his muscles and nerves were saturated with the spirit. His disciples and Swami Ramakrishnananda in particular imbibed this spirit at least in part. The latter never accepted or touched money. At Madras he used to go for his classes in a jutka. On arrival there the coachman would be directly paid by a devotee or a student. When he was returning the devotees would tie in a corner of his wrapper the amount to be paid to the coachman. Money was kept in the drawer of a table in the Math and spent from there. He would never tell the devotees about his wants. The devotees had to come and enquire and supply them. He would dwell insistently on the glory of renunciation and declared repeatedly, "All our power comes from renunciation. Only when we have given up our life do we begin to live. At present we are like prisoners. We may get a glimpse of freedom now and then but the world falls upon us when we are off our guard and drags us once more into our prison cells. As soon as a man finds out, however, that these little pleasures of the flesh are nothing compared with the infinite pleasures of the spirit, he wants to renounce, not for the sake of renunciation but because he has found something better. He realises the hollowness of the worldly enjoyments and can be satisfied with the higher enjoyments only. Renunciation means giving up a lesser thing for a greater." The Swami reiterated, "Those who give up the world for a spiritual life, are giving up the uncertain for the certain, the passing for the permanent."

The Swami was never unfeeling. "If we cannot love others, if we cannot serve others, what are we here for?", were the frequent words on his lips. His heart was large and generous and overflowed with dispassionate love. But he was a monk, one who had renounced, and that meant he must be even-minded in praise and blame, honour and dishonour, victory and defeat. "When a man is vilified and yet shows no resentment or even annoyance," he said one day, "you may be sure he had conquered his ego and is completely detached." Any attack or hostility directed against him left the Swami unmoved. He rose above the pairs of opposites and true serenity beamed on his face. The Lord promises us in the Gita that He fulfils the needs of a devotee who entirely depends on Him. Swami Ramakrishnananda was a firm believer in this teaching of the Gita and put it into practice to the best of his ability. One evening at 5 o' clock a devotee was alone with him talking about the next day's birth anniversary celebration of Sri Ramakrishna. The devotee asked him, "It has been *tomtommed* that there will be a grand feeding of the poor. Till now there is not even a bag of rice with you. How could it be managed?" The Swami in a compassionate tone rebuked the devotee saying, "You are a fool. Have you no faith in Annapurna Devi? She will take care of Her children. We must throw the whole burden on Her and be free from all anxieties. She will work miracles." While the Swami and the devotee were talking thus, to the extreme surprise of the devotee, many cart loads of rice-bags, ghee-tins, and vegetable baskets came and stopped at the entrance of the monastery. This is how Swami Ramakrishnananda was mysteriously helped by God in his work.

Another instance gives a glimpse of the inner life of Swami Ramakrishnananda. On one sultry evening of April, the Swami after supper laid himself down on the cot and a Brahmacharin massaged him as usual. It was about 11 o' clock in the night when the heat appeared unbearable. He suddenly got up, tied his cloth around his waist and entered the shrine. He stood with a fan near the cot on which the Master's picture was laid down for night's rest and began to fan him. After fanning for nearly an hour he quietly kept the fan on the cot and gently walked out of the room. His whole behaviour engendered the feeling in the heart of a witness that the Master was actually sleeping there. The Swami stood in a verandah which was open and faced the sea. A chair was brought for him and he sat in it, and a Brahmacharin began to fan him. Though the closeness of the night was oppressive, yet the stillness of the hour, the music of the waves of the sea and the vast expanse of the glistening waters conveyed an idyllic charm to their minds. The Swami sat speechless and his mind soared high into the empyrean. An hour or more passed in this way and perfect silence reigned all around. The Swami then broke his silence and exclaimed, "My mind is in empyrean heights now. If I sit now in meditation, my mind will pass into Samadhi immediately." At about 2 p.m. he got up and retired for sleep.

Swami Ramakrishnananda gave no quarter to selfishness. To him spirituality meant self-abandonment. "When man asserts himself in man he commits all sorts of atrocities," he once declared, "when God asserts Himself in man he becomes good, pure and virtuous. It is true, every soul as long as it is in a body, has a little bit of selfishness. Selfishness lingers as long as the body-idea persists. If there were no selfishness there would be no body; for, when selfishness is taken away what remains is only God. A Sannyasin can never afford to be selfish. He should be as willing to help his worst enemy as he is to serve his best friend. It is for this we have become Sannyasins—to bring help to every living being without regard to what he does or does not do to us."

One evening several visitors gathered together with the Swami in the hall of the old Mylapore Math. Some one spoke of a certain sannyasin who had exceptional strength and vigour but spent little of it in service to others. Swami Ramakrishnananda remarked with a note of scorn in his tone, "It is easy for the selfish man to be strong and healthy. Suppose it is raining, and some one comes to say that such and such a man is ill with fever. The selfish man says, 'It would not be prudent for me to go out in the rain. I might fall ill myself. Tell him I am sorry but I cannot come. When it stops raining, I may come.' The unselfish man tucks up his *dhoti*, wraps a *chuddar* round his shoulders and hurries out through the rain to the sick man not stopping to calculate risk, or discomfort. Swami Vivekananda, if he heard that a friend was suffering from fever, would rush out and go to him even in the worst storm. He was willing to give his life to save that of another. A selfish man will not venture out in the stormy weather even if his own wife is ill. Such a man is sure to enjoy good health."

"So long as we are selfish, our work is bound to be fruitless. We may deliver fine lectures, we may gain name and fame, but the actual results will be nil. The moment, however, our little self disappears, at that moment our work begins. Then we may live an obscure life, and go nowhere but we shall accomplish wonders. When we drop the ego from our consciousness and live in God we have unlimited power. God is the only existence that is real, all other existences are unrealities behind which God exists as Reality. This Maya is irresistible and it is this which makes us selfish. Only when God is gracious to us can we lift the veil and get a glimpe of Him. Then all selfishness drops off."[3]

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[3] Vide Sister Devamata's article, ***Swami Ramakrishnananda, Sannyasin and Teacher***, in the ***Vedanta Kesari*** for May, 1932.

"The word 'selfishness' is not always understood. When by self I understand the body or the little self and do something for that self, I am selfish. But there is a Self, which is beyond this physical body. When I do something for that Self, that is worshipping God. The man who lives in that higher Self is never selfish. Try to feel God inside yourself and you will overcome all selfishness. When you live constantly in the presence of Divinity the little self loses its power. But so long as the little self rules a man, he is a bond slave. All your anxieties and worries come from selfishness. Let go your little self and they will disappear."

The Spanish Carmelite monk and mystic St. John of the Cross declares that faith is the greatest shelter of the soul. Swami Ramakrishnananda took refuge in this safe shelter and weathered the storms of doubt that overtook him. His faith was immovable whatever the stress of circumstances. When he was a member of the Brahmo Samaj in youth he was assailed by vague questionings but the contact of Sri Ramakrishna dispelled all doubts from his mind. His faith was tested severly many a time and there were occasions when it appeared that the Master had left him to the mercy of men. But he stood like a rock and never wavered. One occasion tried his faith so severely that he buried his face in his hands and as he cried aloud for release tears trickled through his fingers ; yet he never doubted.

Faith was the foundation of Swami Ramakrishnananda's monastic life. He believed that without faith no true devotion or higher vision is possible. "If you should put faith in God on one side," said he one day, "and the lordship of the universe on the other I would take faith in God. Blessed is the man who has faith. He is the happiest of all men because he is free from all anxiety. We are all only puppets in the hands of God. When we understand this, all pride and ambition, all vanity and egotism will go. For this reason that man is blessed who has faith and has realized his puppet nature."

One evening when there were several visitors at the Mylapore Math, one of them asked him, "How can we get such faith as Prahlada had?" The Swami replied, "The more you can purify yourself, the more that faith will come. Although Prahlada was put into boiling oil, although he was thrown under the feet of the mad elephant and hurled over the highest precipice, he was not hurt, because of his faith. But it was not blind faith that he had. It was a faith based on realisation; and if you have the same faith, you will be more powerful than the whole universe. Nothing can put you down. Our faith is too faltering. Few of us believe in God all the time. As long as we have two or three rupees in the pocket, we think we can depend on ourselves. Only when the last anna is gone and we do not know where to get another, do we begin to trust in God. But the man who depends on himself is never safe, while the man who has perfect faith in God is never in danger."[4]

A fervent devotion was the natural outcome of a faith that Swami Ramakrishnananda possessed. He was baptised by his own fervour that burned through and through him. One felt the glow of it even at his approach. Man must love God with his whole heart and mind if he loves Him at all. To give the Swami's words, "If you would find the Supreme Reality, which lies behind all these hollow unrealities, you must be wholly devoted to it. You must worship the living God with your whole heart and give up the worship of things that perish. You must feel the utter hollowness of everything but Truth, as Nachiketa did. Wealth, kingdoms, enjoyments, power were to him nothing—less than a zero. He wanted nothing but Truth and Truth was bound to come to him. You must have the same firm conviction about the hollowness of the material world and seek God with undivided devotion; then he will surely come to you."

Some one asked him, "What kind of devotion takes us to God?" The Swami replied, "The child's devotion to the Mother." Another person present put the question, "What is meant in the Gita by steadfastness in devotion?" "Steadiness in devotion", the Swami said, "means that though you may be busy with many things still your mind is always turned to God. You may not feel the same ardour always, but so long as the hunger for God is there you are steady in devotion."

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[4] Vide Sister Devamata's article "*Swami Ramakrishnananda, Sannyasin and Teacher*, in the *Vedanta Kesari* for Feb., 1933.

From mediaeval records it is learnt that a young monk went to brother Giles, one of the first followers of and the closest companion of St. Francis of Assisi, and complained to him that in his daily routine there was too much labour and too little prayer. Brother Giles looked at him and replied dryly, "If you would beg of the Lord, first work for Him." These words perfectly express the mood and attitude of Swami Ramakrishnananda's mind. He strongly believed in prayer, but prayer to him was not a way of escape from work. Once he was heard to admonish a devotee to pray daily and to make his prayers reach God by the force of his sincerity and earnestness. He had no sympathy with those who complained to the Lord or begged of Him. In his view prayer must make one heroic, not beggarly; and it must be an act of praise and thanks-giving, a communion, not a recital of needs to be fulfilled. Contact with God should remove from one's mind all sense of need. "If a man will be selfish and beg of the Lord," the Swami said, "let him be thoroughly selfish and demand the biggest thing he can think of, i.e., God." He reiterated, "Pray to God constantly, in this way: 'O Lord, grant that I may know my own nothingness and that Thou art all in all. Help me to realise that I am a mere instrument in Thy hand and that all is done by Thee.' When a man comes to understand this, he is truly happy, because he feels secure. He knows all his actions are guided by God who will never mislead him. The man who acts on his own responsibility is sure to make mistakes. But the man who surrenders everything to God always acts wisely."

Swami Ramakrishnananda asked God for nothing, not even for salvation. He was fully satisfied only by loving and serving God. "Heaven," he said, "is a place created by Maya to tantalise man and to entice him from the ideal. We have heard of the sirens in the mid-ocean, who are very beautiful to look at and who sing so sweetly that sailors are irresistibly drawn to them. But as soon as the sirens touch them, they are transformed into beasts. So these heavenly pleasures and the senses are like sirens which entice poor sailors sailing on this ocean of life, and when they hold them in their clutches they transform them into brutes. The scriptures say: Sleeping, eating and propagating we have in common with the lower animals—and how many of us do more than that? We have been transformed by the sirens of Maya until we are little superior to animals."

According to Swami Ramakrishnananda salvation should be the motto of monastic life and not heaven. Not only is heaven too small a goal to strive for but it holds no promise of salvation. To quote the Swami, "There is no leisure in heaven or hell. Only here on this middle plane where these meet there is leisure, where a soul can try to realise God. If a god wishes to attain salvation he must come down and be born as man. Heaven is only a place of continual festivities and enjoyments. But the scriptures tell us that we should be absolutely detached from the enjoyments of this world and the next." "Salvation," he explained, "does not consist in going to heaven. It is the realisation that 'I am God's child' if you are a *Visishtadvaitin*; or that 'I am one with God' if you are an *Advaitin*. Both are one and the same." After a moment's pause he added, "So long as a man is struggling for his rights and believes he is the doer he cannot feel the attraction of God. Only when he sits down and becomes perfectly surrendered does he begin to be drawn upward. Then he says with full conviction, 'I can do nothing, Lord, do Thou act.' At once the Higher Power begins to exert Its influence on him. That man who can throw himself at the feet of the Lord and say, 'All this is Thine; this body, mind and soul all belong to Thee; of myself I am utterly helpless; do Thou take me.'—the Lord takes up that man and makes his hands, his feet, his eyes and ears His instruments. He speaks through his mouth, He works through his hands, He walks with his feet, and the man becomes a living representative of God. This is Salvation."

Again he paused, swept into silence by the swift current of his thought and then came these closing words: "Fill your heart with devotion and your mind will turn naturally to God. The true devotee never thinks of himself. He is so full of God that his own self is forgotten. That is the best way to attain salvation."

"Find God and forget yourself" was the Swami's rule for gaining salvation. And the surest way to find God, was, in his view, surrendering all to Him. Thus surrender and salvation were almost identical terms in the Swami's vocabulary. "Be wholly surrendered," he said, "the moment you can give up everything and know your own nothingness, that moment God-vision will come and you will be free."

On another occasion he said, "It is possible for a man to attain salvation suddenly by the special grace of God. But it can only be done if he can realise that God is all in all, and that he is nothing. If he can realise this, then salvation comes easily. What keeps us from seeing God? Selfishness, egotism, ambition, vanity, and pride. The more we can minimise these the sooner shall we come to the goal. If we can get rid of them altogether, then salvation is ours at once. The more we try to fix our mind on God, the more quickly shall we forget ourselves and attain salvation. The best way to do this is not to think of ourselves in any way but always to make our minds dwell on the Presence of God.

"The man who has realised God will not lack anything." He continues, "What he needs will come to him. That is what Christ meant when he said, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of Heaven and all things else will be added unto you.' This is literally true and it has been verified by history. Those men who have given up everything for the sake of the Lord, and have felt no other attraction but God are honoured and worshipped by the world."

"Surrender yourself completely to the Lord. Then salvation will be yours. A smile will always play on your lips and your face will be shining and your mind will be calm and peaceful."[5]

Whatever is said above by the Swami is a vivid description of his own life. Because he speaks from his life, his words are so emphatic and impressive. He effaced all selfishness from his mind, surrendered himself unconditionally to God and attained salvation through the grace of his Guru.

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[5] Vide Sister Devamata's article, *Swami Ramakrishnananda, Sannyasin and Teacher*, in the *Vedanta Kesari* for April, 1933.

CHAPTER XIV

AS A RELIGIOUS TEACHER

SWAMI Ramakrishnananda was a true teacher of religion. Teaching religion was a natural part of his life. Whoever came to him for inspiration returned satisfied and blessed. His simple words of wisdom enlightened people and dispelled their doubts. He radiated spirituality, as it were, and enlightened the mind that sought his help. Those, who recieved his transforming touch, caught the spiritual warmth of his God-intoxicated being and became religious men. He was not a fluent speaker but what he said had an irresistible appeal because of the weight of realisation behind it. His very presence created a holy atmosphere of silent inspiration around him. Swami Ramakrishnananda's teaching was bold and convincing and went straight to the heart. Those who came to pay him homage returned day after day drawn by the power of his personality. It was not his habit to rise when visitors entered, but from his seat on the rug at the far end of the monastery hall, he would greet them with a gracious smile and a friendly wave of his hand as he requested them to take their places in the group already gathered round him. One devotee testifies to his influence thus: "Every big thought brings to my mind our own beloved Swami's face and his gentle smile. It was a blessed time, those days, and it makes me proud that we of all people had come into contact with that spiritual giant. Only we did not know it then." Another writes, "Those who have taken the dust of the feet of Swami Ramakrishnananda have been turned into gold. A mere touch of his has changed sinners into saints. I can myself see well how his touch has affected me and is keeping me up in my spiritual struggle in spite of the many weaknesses and failures in me. But for him there would not have been a spiritual side to my life at all."

Though the Swami made no disciples, those who came in close contact with him regarded him as their religious teacher. His spirit of devotion was so contagious that those who saw him even for a while caught it. The *mridangam* expert in the Mysore palace happened to play on his instrument on the day Swami Ramakrishnananda opened the National Girls' School in Madras. His meeting with the Swami on that occasion brought about a permanent change in his life. He remembered that as a blessed day of his life. One orthodox Vaishnava said that after his meeting with the Swami, whenever he opened the *Tiruvaimozhi* for his daily reading and thought of Nammalwar and other saints, there stood before him the figure of Swami Ramakrishnananda. Thus the greatness of the teacher whom he had seen enabled him to realise the greatness of the teachers unseen by him.

Personal contact is one of the surest ways of imbibing spirituality. The personality of Swami Ramakrishnananda silently elevated people's minds. There was a deaf boy who spent his days in the Monastery at Madras. He would come early, take his seat on a mat in the hall and watch. When he saw there was anything to be done, he would get up and promptly do it, then sit down again and wait. His deafness was so great that he heard nothing spoken by anybody. Hence he could not hear a word of Swami Ramakrishnananda. But he was content to be near an illumined soul like the Swami and feel the uplifting power of his personality.[1]

While the Swami was at Madras one day a gentleman came to see him from Vaniyambadi. The new comer prostrated himself very respectfully and shed tears of joy at his *darsan*. As he did not know English and the Swami could not speak Tamil, the latter with the help of an interpreter learnt that the former had seen Sri Ramakrishna in a dream, but he could not ascertain who was the saint that had appeared and blessed him. He then happened to see a picture of the Saint in a book shop at Madras and thus found his name. On enquiry he further came to know that a disciple of the Saint was living at Madras. So he came to see the Swami and pay his respects to him. The unknown devotee was overjoyed at the sight of the Swami, who treated him very kindly and spoke to him. The meeting and the talk inspired the devotee so much that he established a Ramakrishna Ashrama in his native village and passed his days in retirement meditating on the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna.

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[1] Vide Sister Devamata's ***Days in an Indian Monastery*** **(p. 92)**

Swami Ramakrishnananda felt for Swami Paramananda 'such love as a widowed mother bears towards her only child.' The latter lived with the former at Madras for six years and was thoroughly trained by him. The senior Swami had seen the younger in a dream before the latter's arrival in Madras. The younger Swami's feeling for the elder is shown in the letters written to Sister Devamata while she was in India: 'Now that you are in Madras and near a great soul, do as he wants you to do. I am not even worthy to carry the shoes of such great souls. You do not need much of my advice nowadays being constantly near an illumined soul.' On his death-bed too Swami Ramakrishnananda remembered the younger Swami and spoke of him with affectionate feelings. Swami Paramananda hearing of the elder Swami's serious illness sailed for India but got the sad news of his passing away at Tuticorin. A customs officer while examining his luggage observed his name and said, 'A Big Swami died the other day.' Swami Paramananda asked, 'What was his name?' The officer said, 'Swami Ramakrishnananda.' The news came to him as a bolt from the blue. He crept into a corner of the railway carriage and sat there for hours dazed and dumb. Then out of the greyness there arose before his closed eyes vividly the benign and shining figure of Swami Ramakrishnananda with the radiant smile which ever lent to his face a transfigured beauty. The vision of that smiling face consoled Swami Paramananda beyond measure. On his arrival at Madras Math he found the place empty without the Swami whom he had loved and admired.

Swami Ramakrishnananda helped one G. N. A. Ranganadan Sarma of Madras at a most critical period of his life to understand himself better than he ever did. Just after leaving College in 1907 at the age of 23 he was pressed by his parents to look for an opening in life. But his attempts in this direction were very feeble. The religious literature that he read at this time led him to feel no attraction for the wordly life but to think of serving humanity. But he was married and was almost penniless! In that state of perplexity he wrote to Sister Nivedita requesting her to suggest to him some course of action best suited to him. Advised by her he went to Swami Ramakrishnananda in Madras and freely opened out his mind to him. The Swami neither ridiculed him for his philanthropic aspirations nor upbraided him for his foolish idea of deserting his wife. Ranganadan writes "Buddha-like serenity sat upon the Swami's forehead, his eyebrows were lifted in contemplation for a time, and then his deep, kindly eyes were fixed upon me, and his lips parted to give expression to the words of wisdom, of which I give the following imperfect summary:[2] 'There is a widespread mistaken notion that religious life cannot be lived in the family. There is nothing unholy or unspiritual *per se* in a family life. There is full scope for unselfishness in the matter of working for others who need one's protection, even in the householder's life. A bachelor has, no doubt, comparatively, more freedom of action than a married man. He has no doubt to look to the fulfilment of his duties towards his parents, before he wishes to breathe a freer atmosphere than that of the home. But a married man has, besides this, other duties to perform, viz., duties to his wife who has a claim to spiritual participation in his lot, to society,—for who else is to maintain the Brahmacharin or the Sannyasin?—and to posterity, through the bringing up of his children in such a way as to be serviceable to society. It would be impossible to have any field of service properly attended to, if all married people were to break their marital ties and straightway turned Sannyasins!

'Also you must rightly differentiate the true soaring spirit, to which earthly ties are as nothing, from the rebellious spirit which is impatient of restraints. If your spirit is of the former kind, do you really feel within you the irresistible and unmistakable call? Such a call comes to very few indeed, and they stand in no need of weighing or asking the question if they will incur any sin by breaking the shackles of

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[2] Vide '*Swami Paramananda and his work*' by Sister Devamata. (p. 166, 167.)

Samsara. They hear the voice and are not conscious of anything but of obeying it. If yours is not such a spirit, then submit yourself to a searching self-analysis of the true motive of your action and find out for yourself if it is not akin to the spirit that fights shy of bearing the burdens of life, the spirit that lacks the heroism to accept life as it is, the spirit that is loath to be useful in humble grooves best-suited to itself, because of its false ambition to loom large in the broad daylight of the world for the sake of name and fame. Reflect well over these questions. There is no hurry at all. If need be come to me again."[3]

An half-an-hour's talk with the Swami illumined the seeker and removed his confusion at the cross-road of life and put him on right way.

In 1908 Swami Ramakrishnananda went to Bangalore along with Sister Devamata of Boston in connection with some work in the Ashrama there. Unfortunately the Sister was down with fever there. As the Swami had to attend on her his public activities were temporarily suspended. But though she was on sick-bed, the Swami took care not to waste her time in useless talk. He spent the time usefully enriching her mind with the knowledge of the Hindu scriptures in the traditional ancient way of teaching i.e. by word of mouth. One after-noon he was obliged to go out on an urgent errand and left a friend with her. On his return his first question was, " What have you been talking about?" The gentleman replied that he had been narrating stories from the great epic, the Ramayana. "That is good," Swami Ramakrishnananda exclaimed in gratified tones, "I had meant to tell you not to waste Sister's time by foolish worldly talk."

Another day a high official of the Mysore Government came to see them. He thought of entertianing the Sister by narrating some harmless court-gossip. While he was speaking, Swami Ramakrishnananda shifted his position in his chair again and again and showed such evident discomfort that finally the Sister asked him if he did not feel well. " I am all right," was his answer, "but I do not like your conversation." The gentleman took the rebuke without offence and changed the subject.

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[3] Vide '*Prabuddha Bharata*' Nov. 1911,

The Swami had thus to speak out bluntly in order to teach him the lesson that it is wrong to while away one's time in idle gossip even in sick bed.[4]

The Swami's solicitude for his students was remarkable. He would watch their habits, manners and conduct in life and try to improve them. He wished that his students most of whom were poor should live more comfortably and enjoy the ordinary amenities of life. He would rather suffer than put his students to any expenditure which their meagre income could not afford. Once a student got a lift in his office and desired to give a monthly subscription to the Math, but the Swami who knew his pecuniary condition was reluctant to accept it.

If the Swami should find a student seated with his chin resting on his palm he would at once ask him to change his posture as it was indicative of a melancholy mood to which a religious aspirant should not yield. If he should find a student shaking his legs when seated on a chair or bench he would immediately direct him to stop it as it showed that his mind was restless. If he should see a student drinking water while standing he would forthwith tell him to sit and drink as otherwise it was likely to upset his system and cause ill health. He never brooked unfairness on the part of students. On one occasion a poor student of his religious class donated fifteen rupees to the Math. When the Swami learnt that the amount was got by the student joining a lottery he admonished him severly, saying that the money earned by unfair means should not be given for religious purposes and that the money got by the sweat of one's brow alone was helpful in one's spiritual progress.

The Swami took care to teach his students how to serve the sadhus. One student who used to visit him in the Ice House was initiated into such service in this way. The student was in the habit of simply saluting the Swami with folded hands saying '*Namaskaram*' and the Swami would return the salute with the words, '*Narayana*'. The

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[4] Vide sister Devamata's '*Days in an Indian Monastery*' (p.198-9)

Swami was not satisfied with the rather curt manner of the student's salutation. One day when the student sat down for a conversation he said, 'Will you shampoo my legs a little?' The student did so gladly and was highly delighted. On another occasion the same student happened to come when a Brahmacharin was fanning the Swami. He was asked to do the fanning and was thus gently taught how to do service to a sadhu.

Though the Swami never depended on men yet his heart was full of love for them. He was pre-eminently generous in his attitude towards others. To condone or forgive a fault cost him no effort. He made light of the mistakes of others. If he spoke of a person's failings, as he did quite frankly, it was without any malice. He was full of loving-kindness for every living being. He said one day. "No love is really love that knows its opposite, hate. True love is always inclusive and universal. So long as a man has an enemy, he cannot know what real love is. That is why Christ tells us, if some one strikes us on one cheek, we should turn to him the other; if he takes our cloak, we should give him our coat also, no matter who it is. Until we are willing to do this, we cannot feel true love. Real love must embrace all."

One evening a visitor asked the question: "How can we cultivate love for God?" The Swami replied: "The nature of love is to love the beautiful. When you see a beautiful person, your heart goes out to him spontaneously. God is the most beautiful being in the whole universe, so it should not be difficult for you to love Him. Now it seems to us easier to love the world than to love God. That is because the ego blinds our sight, so that we cannot perceive the beauty of God. This ego must be conquered. It is always a falsifier. It places itself on the throne which belongs to God and tries to hide God. So long as the ego is on the throne we can never hope to see or love God, Hate and anger are sings of the ego. If a man hates anyone, or gets angry with anyone you may be sure he has not conquered his ego, and cannot feel true love in his heart. What is this ego? A mere soap-bubble. One blow will break it and reveal its hollowness. We must get rid of the ego and reach the stage where we can say sincerely

'Not I, Not I, but Thou.' When you have been able to put down the ego, love of God will come of itself."

The Swami was an untiring student of all the great scriptures. He knew the Bible from cover to cover and expounded it in a spirit and with an understanding which are rare even among Christians. Every Friday at six he held a class at the Hindu Theological High School, Madras. When Good Friday came he once talked on the crucifixion. "The depth of his feeling and the vividness of his description" observes Sister Devamata who was present on the occasion, "were possible only to one who 'had seen' as Browning makes St. John say in his '*Death in the Desert.*'

In speaking of Jesus he once declared: "I always had a strong feeling for Christ even in my boyhood. Christ was truly a great saviour of religion. Without the resurrection Christianity would not have been a religion. It was because he rose again that Christianity lives and he undoubtedly did rise; but I do not believe that He died on the cross. All things are possible with God and despite all that was done a spark of life must have remained somewhere in the body and this was rekindled in the tomb.

"It was the glorious example which Christ gave on the cross that made Christians such willing martyrs. If their Master had been a little less brave His followers would have been indifferent. As it was they were glad to die as their Master had died. Peter, when he was to be crucified, had but one thing to ask: 'Let me be placed with my head downward. My Master died honourably with his head up. It is proper that His servant should die with his head in the dust.' The ways of the Lord are unfathomable. When Christ's disciples were scattered and overpowered by persecution He turned His worst enemy into His greatest apostle. A man who gave no quarter, who when he asked 'Are you a Christian?' and got the answer 'Yes,' at once drew out his sword and struck without mercy—such a one became the greatest defender of Christianity."

One evening there was heavy rain at Mylapore after Arati. Some Mohammedan students passing by that road were stranded and took shelter in the monastery. Swami Ramakrishnananda cordially welcomed them and then with a true spiritual courtesy spoke to them on their religion and the Koran. His exposition of the teachings of Mohammed was so illuminating that the students returned every evening for a week to hear more about it.

Swami Ramakrishnananda often taught that devotion to a sacred duty saves a monk from a precipitous fall. He illustrated this truth by this parable: There was a Fakir of great penances at Delhi. He was loved and revered by all Mussalmans of the metropolis. But his mind once gravitated to lust. Dragged by its power he repaired to the house of a notorious actress on a false plea. The woman was surprised to see the saint at her place. But suppressing her feelings she received the saint warmly and talked to him on religious matters. The saint enjoyed the company of the woman for a pretty long time. When it was evening, the woman told her maid servant to kindle the lights. The Fakir was very regular and devoted in offering earthen lamps every evening to the *dargas* in his place. His daily habit reminded him of his sacred duty. His conscience was pricked and he brushed aside his lustful thoughts. At once he left the house of ill fame, hastened to his cottage and kindled lights to the *dargas*, and was thus saved from a fall by his devotion to sacred duty.

Swami Ramakrishnananda had the knack of disentangling old truths from unnecessary details and prensenting them in a simple understandable form. He helped his audience to percieve old truths in a new light. He spoke not like the scribes but like one with authority. Once, for instance, he had a discussion with Mr. Eric Drew, sometime Principal and professor of Philosophy in the Pachaiyapppa's College, Madras, on religion and politics. He summed up the discussion at the end and said, " Politics is the freedom of the senses, while religion is the freedom from the senses." On another occasion in a philosophical discussion he compared dualism with monism, when he coined this pregnant expression: " In the dualistic method, enjoyment is the ideal; in the monistic method freedom is the ideal. By the first the lover gets the beloved at last and by the second the slave becomes the master.

Both are sublime. One has no need to go from one ideal to the other."[5] Similarly when a devotee asked: "What constitutes morality?" the Swami's answer was: "All that takes man to God is morality; whatever takes man away from God is immorality."[6]

In religious talks and discourses Swami Ramakrishnananda eschewed all metaphysical and philosophical technicalities and presented most abstruse ideas in a simple language quite understandable to lay minds. As a religious teacher he adhered to the Sankara schools of Vedanta and exhorted his students to understand this standpoint through scripture (*Sruti*), reasoning (*yukti*) and experience (*Anubhuti*). He would take his students through simple reasoning to the dizzy hights of realisation which he had attained through the grace of his Guru. He was eager to share his spiritual experiences with others. He would establish that a man is not this body, three and half cubits in length nor the mind, but that he is Infinite in his real nature, he is Reality itself. He would not however leave his students in that supersensuous plane but bring them down to the plane of devotion and tell them how to practise it. This however did not appeal much to the public of Madras who were accustomed to hear Puranic and other stories from the Pundits. Hence his classes grew thinner and thinner. Regarding this dwindling of attendance in his classes the Swami would wittily remark, 'Religion is like *Sakkarapongal* (a kind of sweet dish of the South).' He meant thereby that the mental condition of the people was such that it could not take in more than a limited quantity of religion at a time.

Swami Ramakrishnananda attracted large number of students of Schools and Colleges as well as the young intelligentsia from the middle upper classes of the Hindu Society. His aim was to wean the English-educated youths from their habitual leaning to the materialistic thought of the West, and to make them recognise, appreciate and follow the golden truths that are imbedded in our scriptures. He took great care to reply to their questions and to remove their agnosticism and scepticism. To clear the doubts of his students he used to invite questions at the end of his discourse. One youth took pleasure in plaguing the Swami with all sorts of questions and quick repartees. There were occasions when the Swami seemed to have been cornered but on account of his spiritual illumination he found his way out of the maze of logical fallacy and enlightened the questioner. One day the same youth asked the Swami this fallacious question, 'How could the unperturbable Brahman be ever perturbed?' The Swami's answer to the question was so unintelligible that the youth exulted in having made his position untenable. But the teacher in the Swami could not tolerate this tomfoolery of the youth and angrily came down upon him with the words, "What do you know? You simply flatter yourself without knowing in the least what you are talking about." These words proved to be of saving grace to the inordinate youth and brought him to a sense of seriousness. The irreverent attitude at once left him and a feeling of reverence and understanding flashed in his mind and changed his life. This is how Swami Ramakrishnananda's teaching re-converted anglicised youths to the Hindu view of life and liberated them from their western bias.

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[5] Vide Rao Saheb C. Ramaswami Iyengar's article, ***Swami Ramakrishnananda*** in the ***Vedanta Kesari*** for July, 1922.

[6] Vide Sister Devamata's article, ***Swami Ramakrishnananda, Sannyasin and Teacher*** in the ***Vedanta Kesari*** for April, 1933.

One sultry evening a number of devotees had come directly from their offices to the monastery at Madras, as was their frequent custom, and had gathered round Swami Ramakrishnananda in the monastery hall. As he talked, his face was alight with a radiant smile and his body rocked in rhythm with the rise and fall of his voice. One of the devotees asked him. "Is it possible really to work for men until we have realised God?" The Swami replied, "What do you mean by work for others? You can do nothing unless you have the command of God. Without that if you try to work for others you are sure to be lost in the meandering paths of the world." Then after a moment's pause he continued, "If you would help others you must look at the bright side of every one. Everyman has his weaknesses. But you must overlook them and see only his good qualities. You must give up all fault-finding. If you want to find fault, let it be with yourself." Swami Ramakrishnananda taught people how to be successful in practical life. An old devotee of Madras, who devoted his life to the work of the Master, went to Calcutta to see the Swami in his last days. The Swami was very kind and cordial to him and his parting words to him were: "Devote yourself whole-heartedly to the cause you have undertaken and success will be yours by His grace. You will have to deal with men in various walks of life and seek their help and co-operation. In all your dealings my advice to you is: 'Be Sweet'."

Swami Ramakrishnananda was at his best in his informal talks. He never worried about the size of his audience. Whether he was speaking to two, or to a hundred, or to two thousand, the same ardour gave force and warmth to his words. His inspiration came from within in an abundant flow, however few were present. Once when he had spoken long and impressively on a lofty subject, a western devotee exclaimed, "Swami, you talk to me as if I were an audience of a thousand." "You are" he replied quietly. The Swami spoke from lofty heights. His was an impersonal voice. His appeal was always to the man's soul. "You are pure, you are perfect, you are divine by your nature." These words were frequently on his lips. "A man may mistake a rope for a snake, but any amount of imagination will not turn the rope into a snake. So you may think you have committed many sins or been guilty of wrong-doing, but nothing can change your pure, divine nature. That remains always the same and you are always that."

"Without the help of God no one can realise His eternally perfect nature. Sri Krishna says plainly in the Gita, 'This Maya with which I cover Myself, no one can pierce through. They only can penetrate it who take refuge at My feet.' And again, 'If you would gain wisdom or the knowledge of your infinite nature you must go to one who has realised his infinite nature and serve him: then bring forth your doubts and you will be illumined. That means, you must be humble. Knowledge of the Atman or the Supreme Self comes only through humility." To a worldling the Swami may seem too idealistic but in fact he was very practical. He claimed that vision is the only sure remedy for anxiety. "When worries and perplexities rise in your mind" he said, "You have ceased to believe in God, and that He is caring for us. If we have real faith in God we can never grow anxious." He knew quite well that the solution of a problem does not mean release, for out of that solution will spring forth a new problem. So he tried to cut at the root of all problems by rousing in man his God-consciousness.

"Why should you throw away your perfect nature and take on imperfect nature?" he asked. "Why do you give up your imperishable life for the perishable life of a few years? You have degraded yourself. The omnipotent, omniscient, eternal being is imagining that he dies; that he is limited, ignorant, weak and helpless. You are pure, you are spotless. Do not give way to false imagination. This false imagining will make you what you are imagining yourself to be. You are like a man who hears the false news that his entire fortune has been lost and begins to lament and ask: "What shall I do? How shall I live?", while all the time his lands and money are there as before. So you are wrongly imagining that you are miserable and helpless. But you have not lost your infinite glory. You are absolutely perfect, all blissful, immortal."

"This outer body of yours is only an instrument and cannot limit you except you give it the power. You have actually need of nothing; you are already complete. But you have forgotten it. You have thrown away the real jewel and are making much of the pebble in the street. Do not be content with the little things of this world. This Universe is like a baby's toy. Throw it away. Claim your eternal heritage. This little span of life is not yours; your life has no beginning, no end."[7]

During the hour or two after the evening service Swami Ramakrishnananda used to give the devotees such precepts as these:[8]

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[7] Vide Sister Devamata's article '*Swami Ramakrishnananda, Sannyasin and Teacher*' in the *Vedanta Kesari* for December, 1932.

[8] Vide Sister Devamata's '*Days in an Indian Monastery*' (p. 65.)

"Do your duty, never grow anxious and do not think of the future. Whenever anxiety rises in you, you become an atheist; you do not believe in God and that He cares for you. If you have real faith you can never grow anxious."

"Outer experiences are like pieces of glass which reveal more or less your own nature. The opaque glass which veils the face of happiness in you is what is called pain; the clear glass which lets the flame shine through, you call joy, but that flame is always burning inside you and nowhere outside."

"God was not discovered by Christ. He was not discovered by Buddha. He was not discovered by Mohammed. He is revealing Himself all the time. He has revealed Himself throught the beginningless past and He will continue to reveal Himself throughout the endless future."

"A man who realises God will have to be realizing Him throughout eternity. No power can make him forget Him."

" What keeps us from seeing God ? Our egotism. The more you can minimize that, the nearer you will approach the goal. If you can throw it away altogether, then freedom is yours. The more you can keep your mind on God, the more quickly you will reach Him.

" It is true that I am one from head to foot ; but here I am called eyes ; here I am called ears ; here I am called legs or feet. Thus although I am one self, that which the legs can do the eyes cannot : what the eyes can do the ears cannot. Therefore being one, yet I am many. It is one self that is manifesting itself as eyes, as ears, as nose, as leg, as hands. It is one self at the centre and all these are emanating from that Centre as radii. So God is One, yet He is manifesting Himself in many forms. From the outside standpoint He is many ; from the inside standpoint He is One. From the standpoint of the circumference the radii are many ; from the standpoint of the centre they are one."

" Again when a man looks at one object, sometimes it seems to him to be several. When one appears thus as many it means a deranged vision. So from the standpoint of Truth there can be but one. Only from the standpoint of relativity are there many."

"In the West they have found out evolution, while here in India we have found out revolution—the *Samsara Chakra* or wheel of creation. We have discovered that every thing moves in cycles. In the week we have Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and again in the next week we have the same Monday, Tuesday etc. The Months are January, February, March and again next year the same January, February, March. The seasons rotate. The sun rises and sets again. Every thing in the heavens is revolving. Thus throughout Nature we find rotation or motion in a circle. The evolution theory cannot be final; even granted that evolution would go on throughout eternity, still the result would be finite and compared to infinity it would be infinitesimally small."

"In one day you claim this body as yours for sixteen hours, and for eight hours, when you sleep, you do not claim it as your own. In the same way, when the creative Principle becomes dormant or sleeps, that is the dissolution of the Universe; and when It wakes up, that is creation. As many days and nights make up your life, so many creations and dissolutions make up the life of the Universe. The rotation is endless."

The Swami one evening said: [9]

"Religion never deteriorates; man deteriorates. Religion is eternal, it is always the same. If you stand before that wall it will not reflect your image; but let there be a bit of a mirror on the wall and at once you see yourself. So religion is always there unchanged, but sometimes man reflects it and sometimes he does not."

"Great Incarnations like Christ, Krishna, Buddha were perfectly clear mirrors which gave us a perfect reflection of God or Truth. They did not bring us any thing new. Truth is always existent. Christianity existed before Christ; Christ was only the mouthpiece. Mohammedanism existed before Mohammed; Mohammed was only the mouthpiece. Each was a reflector of the Eternal Truth. One man catches the light from Christ so he says, 'Christ has given me the Truth. I belong to Christ. I am a Christian.' Another sees the light through Mohammed and says, 'I am a Mohammedan.' A third says, 'Buddha reveals the Truth, I belong to Buddha.' So each great teacher has his followers who believe that the Truth can come from him alone; but all teachers reflect the same Truth."

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[9] Vide Sister Devamata's '*Days in an Indian Monastery*' p. 99.

"Human nature is all the same, dresses differ. One man may wear a coat and trousers. I may wear this simple cloth; but underneath nature is all the same. What is there in dress? Naked I came out of my mother's womb and naked I shall have to go away; but behind all dress, all ceremonies and religious rites is this one idea—to realize God. Hindus, Jains, Christians, Buddhists, Mohammedans, all agree in this. To realize God is the aim of religion. The ideal of every religion is God and God alone. Hence we must not find fault with other forms of religion or with differences in external manners and customs. That which makes up the external is the shell side. It is always rough and hard, yet it has one advantage, it preserves the kernel."

"In this apparent battle of life, God is the infinite side and matter the finite side. The infinite is bound to gain the victory over the finite, that is, spirit is bound to conquer matter. It may seem at times that matter overpowers spirit, but that is only for a short period. The infinite is bound to triumph at last."

Another evening the Swami spoke at length on the illusive spell that the world casts over us: "As long as there is intense struggle" he said, "there are still desires which tie us to the world. We have not realised yet its complete hollowness. When we realise that, the way is easy. The world is a place where the unreal appears real, and the real appears unreal. Maya makes us believe something to be where there is nothing, and nothing to be where there is something. It makes the weak seem all-powerful and the powerful seem weak. The poor sage in the forest whose loin-cloth is of bark and whose bed is of bare ground, appears to the world as a weakling; while the King on his throne in a glittering palace appears to it strong; but in reality it is the sage that is powerful. Compared to him the King on his throne is nothing. Recognising this, kings in ancient times, when a sage came to their court, would come down from their throne and prostrate in the dust before him"

"The charm of Maya is so irresistible, it is only when God is gracious to us, that we can lift the veil and get a little glimpse of Him. All Maya is localised in ego. Pull out the foundation and the whole house will collapse. Take away the ego and the whole structure of Maya will fall. Then you will realise a state of perfect calmness. Maya traps us through the senses. He who has conquered his senses has conquered the whole universe."

"If a man should see God what would he ask for?" Sri Ramakrishna, the Master, said once. "Houses and lands ? No! 'God-vision.' Nothing less would seem worthwhile." So was it with Swami Ramakrishnananda. He had no quarrel with the world. He recognised its charms and beauty, but he knew that that charm was ephemeral, the beauty fleeting; while beneath them lay hidden the unchanging, everlasting. "Seek That and That only," was his constant cry. "Don't be content with the little finite things of this world. Don't be satisfied with any thing short of the Infinite. Let your ambition be Infinity. Give up, because you know that what you throw away is perishable. What you gain is imperishable, and eternal. The more you can fix your mind on God and forget yourself, the more quickly will this be done."

"It is not easy" he said one evening "to free the mind of desire. God alone can do it. A man who has no idea of God will never get rid of his desires. He will say: 'If I have no desire what difference will there be between me and the wall? It is desire alone that gives me enjoyment. For every desire there is satisfaction in the world. Why then, should I give up desire?' The man who has devotion for God, however, sees that instead of bringing enjoyment these desires are the source of all his unhappiness. He realises that in God alone can be found satisfaction for all desires. God is infinite bliss and all other happiness is finite and perishable. Hence nowhere but in Him can true happiness be found, a happiness that has no break."[10] These words strike the keynote of Swami Ramakrishnananda's teachings which are a continuous call to Self-realisation or God-vision.

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[10] Vide Sister Devamata's Article "*Swami Ramakrishnananda Sannyasin and Teacher*" in the *Vedanta Kesari* for June, 1932.

One evening the Swami's conversation turned on the origin of evil and one from the group of devotees asked the question, 'How has evil come?' Swami Ramakrishnananda replied: "The dualists say that all the good in man belongs to God and all the bad belongs to the man himself. The monists say that all belongs to God, both good and bad. In reality all is God. It is He who actuates the evil-doer as well as the saint.

"A man has sugar candy to sell in the shape of mango or a bird or a dog. A little boy says to his father, 'Please buy me that bird.' He thinks it will taste sweeter than the mango or the dog, whereas in reality they are all alike. In the same way man looks at the world and calls this good and this bad, but as a matter of fact it is all made out of the same substance. God has created both good and evil; but He is beyond both. He has created the two parties and set them warring against each other, while He looks on as the Witness. All this warring of good and bad, pleasure and pain, is merely the play of God; this creation is His laugh. Some one said to Sri Ramakrishna, 'When God could make all people good, why did He create evil? Why did He not make every one good?' Sri Ramakrishna's answer was, 'Then with whom would He play?'

"It is because we are mistaking the real for the unreal, the unreal for the real, that all this seems so serious to us. We are taking the play to be the real thing and the player to be unreal: whereas the player or God is the one reality and the play of creation is absolutely unreal. If you will analyse your own life, you will find out how vague and uncertain it is—a birth, a death and a little space between. Out of darkness you have come, into darkness you will go, and you call the space between, 'life.' There was no dream; then you dreamed, and then again there was no dream. A dream you look upon as unreal, but this little span of life is just as much a dream, just as unreal as the dream that comes to you in sleep. At any moment death may call you away."

Swami Ramakrishnananda was an illumined teacher of religion. What he taught was only an expression of his experience. The outer world never grew real to him. He was never caught by its charm. He realised the emptiness of earthly beauty and never forgot his Divine origin. This realisation was uppermost in him, and made him a teacher like the Rishis of old.

" Man is made in the image of God ; that is, man possesses all the powers of God, but in a miniature form," he declared once. " Evolution is a process of ' rolling out '. As we evolve spiritually, the inner powers become more and more manifest.

" Evolution means wanting something more. It implies a craving. A craving for more of God 'makes us evolve spiritually, a craving for outer things or earthly powers brings material evolution. The same craving is in the ant, in the angel, in man and in the *Siddhas* Man worships the gods to satisfy this craving. But Bhagavan Sri Krishna cautions every one against worshipping the gods. ' Those who worship the gods go to the gods,' he says, ' but My devotees come to Me.' What is desirable ? Is it desirable to go the gods or to the Supreme Being ? Sri Krishna answers this explicitly : ' Those who depend on me, I provide for them, I take care of them, I become their servant.' "

The question was asked, "Can a man ever do as he likes?' The Swami's answer was : "Sometimes he thinks he is doing as he likes, but in reality God is guiding all his movements. God is the only Doer, nothing is done by man." The devotee asked again : "Then what is the use of man's making any effort to be good or to realize God?" Swami Ramakrishnananda replied : "You cannot stop acting. Your very nature is to act. Can you remain perfectly quiet even for a moment? This body is born to act. Your hands, your feet, your eyes and ears have a natural tendency to action. As long as you must act, you will want to do that which will bring the most desirable results; so, as long as you act you will have to try to be good, to be virtuous, to be unselfish, in order to get the desirable results you are seeking, and since

God is the most desirable result to be attained, you will have to strive to realize Him."[11]

If Swami Ramakrishnananda was conservative in his mode of worship, he was essentially a liberal as a religious teacher. Tolerance, universality of outlook and freedom from prejudices characterised his teachings. He defined religion as the struggle of the spirit against matter and he welcomed whatever helped in the struggle. When someone came with words of condemnation on his lips he was heard to say, 'Never find fault with any form of religion. Differences lie only in the external customs. That which makes up the external is the shell. It may be hard and rough and perhaps not to our liking. But it holds a valuable kernel. The kernal of every religion is God. To whatever religion a man belongs he has to worship the same God. The essential parts of religion are everywhere the same. It is only in the non-essential parts that differences are found. Various religious doctrines and beliefs are merely partial manifestations of Truth. But because they have that little reflected light of Truth in them we take them to be the whole of Truth. Throw away the idea of 'me' and 'mine' and give up all to God—this is the essential of every religion. This is what Christianity teaches, this is what Mahomedanism teaches; what Hinduism and Zoroastrianism teach, what every religious sect teaches."

Swami Ramakrishnananda's teachings had no compartments like esoteric and exoteric. He broadcasted to all the Truth as it is. He never liked mystery-mongering. "According to Hindu teaching there is no mystery" the Swami once said to Sister Devamata.[12] "Whenever there is a mystery there is a flaw. Mystery is weakness. It is blindness. There is nothing in this world that cannot be explained rationally. There should not be anything mysterious connected with religion. God is in no way a mysterious Being. He is clearer than day, than night, than the sun. People say that these yoga practices are mysterious. Mystery means something that cannot be explained. When a man is physically weak he takes to cunning; when he is spiritually weak he takes to mystery." Unless a teacher takes his stand on realisation he cannot be so bold, so clear, and so emphatic, as the Swami.

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[11] Vide Sister Devamata's article *Swami Ramakrishnananda. Sannyasin and Teacher* in the *Vedanta Kesari* for April, 1933.

[12] Vide her "*Days in an Indian Monastery*" p. 85-86.

The teachings of Swami Ramakrishnananda have always these two-fold ends in view—the conquest of the mind and attainment of God-vision. He once said to Sister Devamata.[13]

"Mind is like a big mirror which gives a perfect reflection but which has been so thickly covered with dirt that nothing can be seen in it. The more you can rub off that dirt the more you will be able to see yourself in it. The more you can remove the least speck of dust the more you can get a perfect image of your true self. What is that dirt that hides the image? Selfish desires.

"There was once a great *Tyagi* (one who has renounced). He cared for nothing in the world, only he had a little love for his *Koupinam* (loin cloth). He kept it hanging on a tree and sometimes the rats used to come and gnaw it. This annoyed him very much. 'What!' he would say, 'I have nothing in the world but this Koupinam and the rats want to take this from me!' So he got a cat to keep off the rats. A cat, however, requires milk. So he asked one of his disciples to bring him a cow. The cow again requires fodder, so he asked for a pair of bullocks that he might till the ground. Thus he added one possession to another until finally he was unable to look after them."

"Our Master, Sri Ramakrishna, used to say that as when you catch hold of one end of the creeper that grows on the surface of still water, the whole tank will come; so if you have one selfish desire, that connects you with the entire universe. Be free from every selfish desire. That is purity. Purity means singleness. Desire is a very dangerous thing. Sometimes we think we have killed all selfish desire; but somewhere in our mind there lingers some remnant; and as from a spark left in the corner of the hearth may come again a big fire, so out of that small remnant may spring a huge fire of desire."

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[13] Vide her *Days in an Indian Monastery* p. 92-95.

One evening some one asked Swami Ramakrishnananda how one should practise meditation. His answer was: "Meditation means complete Self-abandonment. Meditation requires complete annihilation of self-consciousness. You know before a great light, lesser lights disappear; so before the effulgent glory of God, the little glory of the ego will completely vanish, as stars vanish when the sun rises. You must therefore practise the Presence of God inside you."

"You may say, 'I cannot see Him with these eyes of mine. I cannot hear Him with these ears. How then, am I to perceive Him?' You can never perceive Him in this way. To go to the Creator you must throw aside these instruments which take you directly to the creation. You must go beyond your mind and senses, then meditation will come of itself. This is the only way to get inner vision. These senses are made for the creation, not for the Creator."

"God is always supposed to be perceived more clearly at the point of meeting between the two opposite poles. He is neither light nor darkness, but He is beyond both. He is to be found just where they meet. Hence the twilight hour, morning and evening—the meeting place of day and night—is considered the best time for meditation. Also at the noon-time, just when the sun reaches its highest point and begins to drop down towards night. The voice rises to its highest pitch at that hour and even the cries of the street-vendors grow shriller. As sound and mind are inseparably connected, sound being the primary expression of mind, so the mind also reaches its greatest height at noontime."

The question was asked: "Could not God free us from ignorance at once if He wished?" Swami Ramakrishnananda answered: "Surely; but He is so infinitely loving that He does not wish to molest us. So long as He sees that we really cling to our ignorance and own desires He does not come to free us. Only when we turn all our desires to

Him, then He comes and selfishness and ignorance go away. But we must not bribe the mind, we must not pretend to be free from desires. The feeling must be absolutely sincere; no fraud or bribery.

"If you wish to see God, the only way is to make the mind single and one-pointed. If we pray to God in right earnest with our whole heart, He is sure to come to us. The trouble is, we pray to so many others besides God. We pray to the doctor to give us health, to the shop-keeper to give us food, to another for something else and in among the rest, we pray to God to give us spiritual light and knowledge. When we look to Him and pray to Him and to no one else, He is sure to answer our prayers, if we make them really intense.

"We must not cease to strive for the highest even though it seems unattainable. We must keep God as our ideal and aim, that will pull us on. If a man aims at the sky, at least he may strike the top of a tree. If he aims at the top of the tree, he may not get above the ground."

Swami Ramakrishnananda was gifted with a remarkable intellect. He possessed the power of original thought to an unusual degree and had many intellectual attainments. But he never made a display of his learning, nor did he allow it to overshadow his spiritual vision. Religion was his vocation and intellectual pursuits were his recreation. He believed that a man's knowledge rested on his own experience, not on the experience of others. A somewhat bombastic pundit spent an hour at the monastery one late afternoon. When he had gone Swami Ramakrishnananda remarked with a shade of displeasure in his voice: "When a man is vain on account of his learning, what does he gain? Even if he has read all the Vedas, he is not qualified to know the Truth. Real learning is that which will enable a man to realise the Truth. As our Master used to say, 'Repeating 'rice', 'rice', will not appease your hunger.' So repeating the texts of sacred books will not satisfy your spiritual hunger. Your hunger will be satisfied when you see God. Intellectuality and spirituality are diametrically opposed to each other. Intellectuality is based on ego and spirituality on annihilation of ego."

But he never undervalued the use of the intellect. He was fond of studying Sanskrit scriptures. A difficult passage in a Sanskrit text was to him what a book of adventures would be to a young boy. In his lectures he quoted the Upanishads frequently like Swami Vivekananda. One evening speaking of the delight of scriptural study he exclaimed in enthusiasm: "The Upanishads are the most wonderful books. One should learn Sanskrit in order to be able to grasp their true meaning. They are a concise statement of all the great truths of the Universe. Every line is the expression of a mind that has realised. Those who gave them out had realised God, and he who has realised God is the same as God Himself. Those great seers were the embodiments of purity. So they were able to perceive all Truth." The Swami also knew well the scriptures of other peoples and of other faiths and felt profound reverence for all alike. "Every nation" he declared "has its scriptures through which God has pointed out how to reach Him."

One evening when several devotees were present in the monastery hall he began: "Why do we want to know? To satisfy something in ourselves. The end of all knowledge is satisfaction and this satisfaction is always one. There are three kinds of knowing; first, instinctive knowledge, then reasoning and then inspiration. The lower animals have instinct. Much of our knowledge is also instinctive. Then man begins to reason and as long as he reasons the ego must be there. From reasoning he can pass on to inspiration. Then all knowledge will come to him not through the process of reasoning but by direct illumination. All slavery comes to an end when man realises Truth."

"Remaining in the mind you will never get away from doubt;" he continued "for how long do you 'think'? As long as there is doubt in your mind. When you have reached a definite conclusion about a thing you cease to think about it. So thinking and doubting are synonymous If you make much of mind you make much of doubt. People are sceptics. Why? Because they make much of this little mind. But the mind never directs a man properly. Go beyond the mind and you will go beyond all doubt. Inside the body there is desire and greed. Inside the mind there is doubt. Inside the world there is change, there is death. Go beyond this and you will find peace and bliss. Until you go beyond them you can never realise what peace and bliss mean."

Someone asked, 'If we go beyond the mind do we give up the habit of discrimination?' 'To be able to go beyond the mind is the result of highest discrimination' was the Swami's incisive answer. Another visitor asked, 'Do we go beyond the mind in sleep?' 'In sound sleep, yes;' the Swami replied. "How do we remember our dreams?" one asked again. 'When you fall asleep and dream, you lose the consciousness of your physical body, but you don't lose consciousness of your Self. That occupies your consciousness and records the dream.' 'How can we overcome the restlessness of the mind?' was asked. 'By fixing it on God,' the Swami repiled. 'As long as mind goes out to the world through the senses it will be restless, and it will be weak. The more a mind is restless, the weaker it is; the more it is calm, the stronger it is." Then he added with emphasis, "Light the fire of wisdom in your mind and heart and nothing weak or impure will dare approach you. When that fire is kindled all imperfections and impurities are burnt to ashes."[15]

The Swami's own mind was saturated with the thoughts of God. He exemplified in himself what he once said to a devotee, "A man who has realised God must keep on realising Him all his life." He believed that to realise God is the aim of every human being whether he knows it or not. "No man" he said, "who has not true love towards God can be religious. Religion begins with attraction to God, and no soul will ever find real satisfaction until he has reached God. All bondage comes to an end when man realises Him. As a matter of fact all men are loving God; for everyman loves eternal life, all knowledge and all blissfulness and these are God. But few men know they are loving God. They are like a man who has been hearing of mangoes all his life but has never seen one. He may eat a mango and not know it unless some one comes and tells him. So all men are loving God; but only when some one comes and tells them, do they know it. If they can once realise that God is the most lovable being in the whole universe they will learn to love Him consciously; all their thoughts will flow towards Him and they will be naturally religious."

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[15] Vide Sister Devamata's '*Swami Ramakrishnananda Sannyasin and Teacher*, in the *Vedanta Kesari* for August, 1932.

"The realisation of God cannot be attained in a hap-hazard way," the Swami continued. "There is a regular method. First you must hear, then you must understand what you hear, and from understanding you go on to realisation. You must know where the light is, otherwise you may go in the opposite direction to find it. Next, you must hear from a teacher how to go to it. Then you must understand clearly just what it is; and when you have understood, realisation will come. So long as it does not come you must go on discriminating and trying to understand,"

The profundity of the Swami's thought swept him into silence for a moment. Then he went on: "It is true that the average man is not ready to perceive Truth. You must be Truth to know Truth. You must live it and make it a part of your experience; otherwise you cannot know it. The finite can never know the Infinite, but we can have some intellectual perception of what it is. If that were not the case, why should we be so eager to attain it? One must get everything from inside or from Nature. Nature is God's Book and blessed is the man who knows how to read it."[16]

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[16] Vide Sister Devamata's article '*Swami Ramakrishnananda Sannyasin and Teacher*', in the *Vedanta Kesari* for July, 1932.

CHAPTER XV

A PEEP INTO HIS WORKS

IN ORDER to have an idea of Swami Ramakrishnananda's mind it is essential to peep into his published works. The Swami is the author of some half a dozen books in Bengali and English published from Calcutta, Madras and Boston. He was an erudite scholar and a profound thinker and had a good style in English, Bengali and Sanskrit. An attempt will be made in this chapter to give the reader an idea of his works in all these three languages.

The literary career of Swami Ramakrishnananda was firmly founded on Sanskrit scholarship. He imbibed his love of Sanskrit probably from his father, who was well versed in Sanskrit scriptures. The Sanskrit poem which he composed in memory of Swami Vivekananda and the Sanskrit speech which he delivered at the Mysore Sanskrit college are the only two Sanskrit compositions of the Swami available. But these two are enough to testify to the depth of his Sanskrit scholarship. At Madras he was often found with a well thumbed Sanskrit tome in his hand. He believed that Sanskrit as a language had a quality not shared by any other language. He could speak in that language fairly fluently. One afternoon some South Indian Pundits came to the monastery at Madras. They knew neither English nor Bengali, the mother tongue of Swami Ramakrishnananda. The Swami had too limited a knowledge of Tamil, their native tongue, to carry on a serious conversation in it. So the Pundits proposed that they should converse in Sanskrit. The Swami sat on the rug opposite to them rocking slowly back and forth as he often did and gave in Sanskrit ready answers to their questions or remarks.

A profound acquaintance with the Sanskrit scriptures by no means gave the full measure of the Swami's Sanskrit learning. The Swami was strongly desirous of attempting a book in Sanskrit reconciling the three great systems of philosophy propounded by the three great Acharyas—Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhwa. But his desire was not fulfilled on account of ill health caused by over work. But the central idea of his philosophical synthesis is fortunately found in his Sanskrit lecture delivered at Mysore. Though the lecture was short yet it was substantial and gave an idea of the religious harmony lived and taught by his Master.

In that lecture the Swami first gives in a nutshell the fundamental principles of the philosophies of Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhwa and then points out the unanimity existing amongst them. The point they all agree upon is the cessation of *Samsara* through God-realisation, although there is divergence of opinion among them regarding the conceptions of God and soul as well as the methods of attaining that beatitude. In order to bring out the spirit of universality that charaterizes our religion the Swami quotes Pushpadanta's famous verse which in translation is as follows: " Amongst the different creeds of the Veda, Sankhya, Yoga, Pashupata and Vaishnava, there are some who claim one of them to be superior to others. As rivers, issuing from different sources run crooked or straight to the one ocean, so all the religions rising from different standpoints lead to Thee O Lord". The Swami then observes, " Although these creeds appear to be different on account of the divergence of tendencies and aptitudes, yet the goal they have in view is one. Hence it is quite evident that the goal is one. As the different radii of a circle, taken from the different points of its circumference converge to the same center so do all apparently conflicting religions lead to one God".

Swami Ramakrishnananda contributed several articles in Bengali to *Udbodhan*, the Bengali Journal of the Order. Swami Vivekananda's sanskrit hymn to the Divine Mother, called *Ambastotra*, was rendered by him into Bengali verses. The famous Sanskrit hymn called *Mukundamalastotra*, containing 40 verses was also translated by him into Bengali and published in the first volume of the *Udbodhan*. He immensely liked the fifth verse o this hymn and often chanted it at the beginning of a discourse or lecture at Madras. The verse, in English translation runs as follows :—

"I have desire neither for the acquisition of virtue nor for the performance of good deeds, nor the earning of money nor for the enjoyment of desire. Whatever is destined to happen according to past deeds may happen. My only prayer is that You be gracious enough to grant me unswerving faith in Thy lotus feet in every birth."

The Swami also contributed four interesting articles to the same Bengali periodical on 'The Temples of South India,' 'Philosophy of Nirvan', 'The Philosophy of Egoism', and 'The Ramakrishnatattwabhasa.'

Udbodhan, the Bengali organ of the Ramakrishna Order, was started as a fortnightly journal on January 14, 1899. In its first issue, the first article entitled 'Prastavana' (Introduction) was written by Swami Vivekananda. Swami Ramakrishnananda translated this article into English and published it in the *Brahmavadin* of January 15, 1899.

The only regular work in Bengali of the Swami is the life of Sri Ramanujacharya. It is a standard work in that language and is considered to be a classic. The book appeared serially in the pages of *Udbodhan* for about eight years (1899-1906), and was brought out by the Udbodhan Office after the death of the author. For the purpore of writing this book the Swami visited the various places in South India in which Sri Ramanuja lived. He conversed with many Vaishnava scholars and gathered materials at first hand. The book is divided into 31 chapters and runs to about 300 pages. The subject is very sympathetically treated in classical Bengali and the work has proved exhaustive and comprehensive. It is no exaggeration to say that it is the first work in Bengali on the life and philosophy of Sri Ramanuja as well as on the history of the Sri Vaishnava Sect founded by the Acharya. This noteworthy volume is widely read by the Bengali students of religion and has passed through several editions.

The various discourses that the Swami delivered in English have been collected and published in the form of books. The most popular among them is *Universe and Man.* It was his first book and the first publication of the Madras Math and dedicated to Swami Brahmananda. This little book, first published in March, 1908 contains the inaugural lectures of Swami Ramakrishnananda delivered when the first permanent building of the Ramakrishna Math, Madras, was consecrated in 1908. Having read a copy of the book just then published, the Yuvarajah of the Mysore State began to admire the author and sent a large donation to the Madras Math.

The book contains six lectures entitled 'The Message of Sri Ramakrishna', 'The Universe', 'Space and Time', 'The Self-imposed Struggle', 'The Vedanta', and 'Bhakti'.

As the editor of the book observes, "...it presents the message of Sri Ramakrishna as related to the Universe and to Man, and culminates in an exposition of the basic principle of all the teachings of the Master—the practice of true devotion." The first lecture begins by making a distinction between true religion and conventional religion. "Religion, as it is practised" observes Swami Ramakrishnananda "is altogether different from religion, as it should be practised." Then follows an analysis of the philosophical systems propounded by Sankara, Madhwa and Ramanuja as well as of Chirstianity, Islam, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism and Judaism. About the Semitic prophets the Swami makes these illuminating observations: 'Moses realised God outside himself in a bush. But Christ realised the Kingdom of Heavan inside himself. If that Kingdom is inside you, God is inside yourself... Mohammed went to the seventh heaven led by the angel Gabriel. It is said that although he blindfolded himself with seven layers of cloth, still he could not get rid of the light of illumination. This story shows that Mohammed's light was of inner illumination; that is, his inner mind was illuminated by wisdom.'

In the lecture 'The Self-imposed Struggle', the Swami shows that this ever-changing eternal creation is nothing but a series of self-imposed struggles of the Supreme Self, which caught in the net of five elements, weeps. "When man reaches the supreme state of self-realisation" the Swami observes, "and gains a permanence there, he is one with the eternal, omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient mind—the Universal soul. That is he finds himself to be Brahman. He is then above all troubles and turmoils of the world, free from all its cares and anxieties, seeing himself in all, and all in himself, and feeling himself to be the one soul of the entire creation. Now he exclaims with the great Maharshi. Ashtavakra: "The Universe has emanated from me, it is destined to end in me, as an earthen vessel losses itself in earth at last, as the waves die in water, as a golden ornament losing its form becomes gold in the end. Oh joy! I bow down to my own eternal Self which has no end even when all beings from the highest to the lowest with the entire universe die. Oh joy! I bow down to myself as I am alone without a second and even though I have a body, I neither come nor go, for I cover the whole universe. Oh joy! I bow down myself to myself for there is none abler and cleverer than myself, as the universe is held in my body without even touching it. Oh joy! I bow down to myself who has nothing or has all, that can be comprehended by thought and language."

The last chapter of this book is devoted to Bhakti. Swami Ramakrishnananda was essentially a bhakta; hence whatever he says on bhakti is inspiring and illuminating. The Swami is of opinion that the path of Bhakti is the easiest, best and most practicable of all. The personal aspect of God which a bhakta worships is greater than his impersonal aspect. "One of the greatest teachers of humanity, Sri Ramakrishna" the Swami observes, "has taught us that the glory of the Lord is not so much in His omnipotence, or in His infinite majesty, or in His irresistible will, as in His condescension to stoop to the level of His devotee in the capacity of one equal to or even inferior to him." How the impersonal God becomes personal is explained by the Swami as follows in the words of his Master: "Sri Ramakrishna Deva used to give us the following illustration. Water has no definite shape and so takes the shape of any vessel that holds it. But intense cold sometimes makes it assume the shape of icicles and the like. Even so God, who is naturally formless and hence nameless assumes a form for the sake of His devotees. Being all-powerful and all-gracious He can have form or no form."

While describing the true love of God the Swami observes, "True devotion is selfless. Whether the Beloved is rich or poor, still the devotee's whole soul is for Him and no one else. He does not want anything from God. Like the *Gopis* of Brindavan he does not like to know, whether God is all-powerful or not. He knows Him to be his Beloved; that is all. He always wants to give something to God; but never wants to get anything from Him. The true lover of God must be more than perfect. For a perfect man may be self-contained and self-satisfied, but he may not have the power of satisfying others; just as a reservoir of water, full to the brim, is self-contained and lives only in itself. Not so the perennial spring, which is not only full in itself, but also springs out of itself with overflowing munificence for the sake of others. A true devotee is like that. He lives not so much for himself as for his Beloved and for those who belong to Him."

Then the Swami says that true love of God is not possible without self-knowledge. "In order to be a true lover of God" he says "one must know one's perfect nature, which is beyond hunger, thirst and other wants. True love of God or Bhakti comes after the realisation of one's true self or Atman which is perfect in everyway." To corroborate his statement the Swami quotes this from *Srimad Bhagavatam*: "Even such perfected souls, who are wholly satisfied with themselves, who have no bondage and nothing more to learn and who thus are silent, love the Infinite One, the Lord of the Infinite Universe disinterestedly. Such is His irresistible charm."

Another important work of Swami Ramakrishnananda—*Sri Krishna the Pastoral and Kingmaker*—first appeared in the form of a book in April, 1909 from Sri Ramakrishna Mission, Madras. Like *Universe and Man* this book was dedicated to Swami Brahmananda. His dedicatory words are :—"To his serene Holiness the Swami Brahmanandaji, President of the Ramakrishna Mission, this little book is dedicated by his devoted servant Ramakrishnananda."

The first of the two lectures comprising this book was delivered before the Triplicane Literary Society at Madras on Sri Krishna Jayanti day in 1898. The eminent lawyer, Sri Parthasarathi Iyengar presided on the occasion and the audience consisted of the most learned gentlemen of Triplicane. The deep impression made upon them by the Swami's eloquent words led to the publication of the lecture as a booklet by some of his students. The second lecture was read before the members of the Egmore Reading Room in 1899 on the birth-anniversary of Sri Krishna, and brought out as a separate booklet. "The difficulty of giving a clear account" writes a student of Swami Ramakrishnananda "of any portion of the full and varied life of the great Incarnation, Lord Sri Krishna, can only be known to those who are familiar with *Srimad Bhagavatam* and many other books from which the facts of that great life must be gathered. That the Swami should have been able in the small compass of two short lectures to reproduce so faithfully the glowing and replete narratives of the inspired works of Parasara and Vyasa with their wealth of descriptive details, shows how thoroughly he is a master of his subject. There are indeed few writings which present so vivid a picture of the pastoral life and public career of the Lord Krishna in so concise a form and for this reason this volume must always possess a value of its own." The book which is a faithful and glowing epitome of the Bhagavata account of Sri Krishna's life at Brindavan and Dwaraka, has gone through several editions.

Swami Ramakrishnananda's work '*The Soul of Man*' was fiirst published in 1910, It comprises four lectures (1. Science, modern and ancient 2. Determination of conscious tendencies 3. Regions higher and lower 4. The locus of the Soul) which were delivered by him during the Christmas season of 1909. The author dedicates the book to Swami Brahmananda and contributes a preface to its first edition. In the preface he observes: 'This little book is intended for all humanity. It contains the gospel of the ancient sages of India that declares in the most unequivocal language the eternal, all-knowing and all-blissful nature of man. According to them man is rooted, not in food and drink, not in climate and soil, not in body and mind, not in space and time; but in *Sat* or Spirit which is absolutely one, without a second. Such good news they have brought to us after having realised their own eternal, all-blissful and all-knowing nature so that we also may be saved from the false fear of death and countless other miseries. These realisations constitute the ancient science of the Veda from which we learn that true happiness, true knowledge and true life should be sought inside one's own self, and not outside. But alas! almost all the men of the world are doing exactly the opposite. They cannot even imagine themselves to be immortal and consider such a claim but a madman's dream...Thus we see that ignorance, which is the cause of all miseries, has been troubling all men from the very beginning of time in the form of ego which has made the eternal appear as non-eternal, the all-blissful appear as miserable, the all-knowing appear as ignorant, the all-powerful appear as weak, the Infinite appear as finite and the master appear as slave. Hence the one duty of every man should be to eradicate this ego rooted in ignorance with the axe of wisdom which teaches that man is infinite by nature"

"Almost all the men of the world being so, how can this little book which preaches the renunciation of egoism following in the footsteps of the holy sages of India, be of any use to humanity, which is not going to profit by its impracticable advice? In answer we say, man may not have a heart to follow the path marked herein but certainly he is eternally restless for the goal that has been held out to him by the sages, and if nothing short of that goal can bring complete satisfaction to him and if there is no other path leading to it, he must be made to go through it somehow or other. He may not have a heart at present to take up the path but in this or some other future incarnation of his when his imaginary heaven will appear to him in its true colour, then the knowledge of the path leading to salvation will be a great boon to him, and so although this book can help only a few directly it can certainly help every one indirectly...and to make it more acceptable to the modern readers the truths of the ancient science have been garbed in the language of modern science as far it has proved practicable."

Swami Ramakrishnananda wrote as follows on 19-11-'10 from Madras to V. Kunhikannan, Secretary of the Theosophical Society Lodge of Tellicherry, in answer to his questions and comments after reading the Swami's book, '*The Soul of man*':

"It is not possible for me just at present to answer all your queries. I should like you to read my *The Soul of Man* a little more carefully. Nothing has been said there as a matter of belief. I have simply asked my readers to use their reasoning powers to their fullest extent. Credulouness befits only a fool.

"According to us, whatever is rational constitutes religion. We should not turn away with disgust from facts which we cannot relish. Heaven and hell are separate localities just as the earth is, but they exist only for those who believe in the objective reality of the universe or in other words, who are under the influence of Maya or delusion. To the wise men, neither heaven, nor hell nor earth exists. He knows that there is but one Truth and that is here and now. He sees the glory of his own Supreme Self and nothing else.

"Our vision is but limited. There are many beings living beyond our ken. Microscopes and telescopes increase the power of our vision; there is another and far superior method to make our vision limitless and that is disentangling it from its seats, the eyes which are limited by their very nature. The eyes only circumscribe our vision, and although they may be helped by microscopes and telescopes their limitations never leave them. If by means of instrospection, you can gradually separate the powers of your vision from its limited seats, the eyes, the optic nerves, and the centre in the brain, you will make that power infinite, and see *Yakshas*, *Vidyadharas*, *Siddhas*, *Charanas*, *Kinnaras* and many gods and demigods. The infinite caught in the network of the nerves appears to be finite. By means of mental concentration you can disentangle your senses, your mind and your self from it.

"If you read *Srimad Bhagavatam* (an English translation will do) you can know the topography of heaven, hell, and *patala Lokas*.

"If by merely using some big and conventional technicalities I would make you understand all that I have said in the book, I could easily do that: but that would be making confusion worse confounded. The more we avoid big terms the better. We become so much the more natural thinkers in that way.

"If you ever come over to Madras in the near future and kindly pay a visit to me, we can clear our doubts by talking to each other.

"Till then you will have to remain satisfied with what little and unsatisfactory answers I have given to your queries. God bless you. The very fact that you are able to put such nice questions shows that you are alive. It is only idiots, and perfected souls, that do not question. If there is a question, there is surely an answer to it. May the answers to all your questions come out from within yourself where the true searcher has his permanent abode. Appeal to Him, and I can dare say, if you are really earnest,the answer will come."

To Path Perfection is a lecture which appeared first as a booklet in 1910, and was later included in the complete works of Swami Ramakrishnananda entitled *The Message of Eternal Wisdom.* Therein he defines perfection as salvation which consists in realising one's immortal nature. The Swami describes the apparent man who is full of wants and is ever restless, and the real man who has realised his eternal nature and is therefore wantless. Though the apparent man is diametrically opposite to the real man yet they are one and the same. The restlessness of man is due to the fact that he wants to regain his lost nature. "The very fact that he is dissatisfied with his finite nature," says the Swami, "shows that it is not his natural condition. The fact that he has infinite ambition, that he has insatiable hunger for more and more, proves that he is infinite by nature; and that is why he is always dissatisfied with whatever is finite." The finite nature of man is bound by his world of experience. As soon as he extricates himself from his world he realises his infinite nature. "It is therefore evident" the Swami says, "that to go away from the universe is to go away from the mind and the senses; and when you do that you find that eternal life. It was in this way that your forefathers realised their infinite nature They did it by going away from their external senses, and from their inner sense, the mind. And if you can do this at once you will realise your eternal life. Then absolute bliss will be yours. This is salvation." Then the Swami in that lecture exhorts his audience to realise their perfect nature and attain perfection, thus:

"Be never satisfied with little. You are infinite, you are all-perfect, and until you realise your infinite nature you must not stop. Do not think that you are intellectually limited. You have the brain of a Socrates, you have the intelligence of a Newton. Only you have allowed a lot of dust and dirt to cover it over. Wipe away the dust, arouse your ambition, stir up your activity and know that all power is latent in you. You are not limited. No, you are as limitless as any of the greatest sages of yore, between whom, and God, space and time never intervened,"

Another lecture of the Swami on 'The Necessity of Religion' is published in his complete works. In it he emphasizes the need of practising religion in life. "Always mixing with the world and identifying ourselves with the body we are prone to forget religion which awakenes us to the real state of affairs we are in, and opens to us the gate of eternal bliss and keeps us away from being drawn down to the object life of beasts, doing nothing but eating and drinking and making merry. Such being the case, there must be something that will occasionally remind us as to who we are, and what we should do, so that we may not be altogether forgetful of our duties here. It is religion that fulfils this purpose."

While pointing out the difference between religion and irreligion the Swami observes: "Let us therefore be particularly careful not to mistake irreligion for religion, and, as true religion should be courted with all zeal and fervour, irreligion in the garb of religion should be carefully eschewed, and repudiated with all energy and care. The one characteristic of irreligion is its narrowness and intolerence, and wherever you find these qualites know it to be far away from the abode of peace, although the grab of it may be blazoned and paraded in full prominence in the form of *tripundrums* or of crosses or of big and massive temples yoked to an immense amount of wealth and power. As religion is our best friend, irreligion is our worst enemy and no good and wise man will harbour such an enemy in his bosom. If you want to have real bliss, give up vain fretting and fuming, and instead of criticising others, criticise your own self and try to eradicate whatever evil there is in you, and thus becoming pure and spotless, at last be perfect even as the Father in heaven is perfect. This is what is called true religion, and can there be any question as to the necessity of such a religion ?"

Sister Devamata while at Madras took notes of some class lectures of Swami Ramakrishnananda and published them serially in the pages of *The Message of the East* the monthly organ of the Vedanta centre of Boston. The three lectures entitled 'Search after Happiness,' 'Some characteristic features of Divine Incarnation', and 'Evolution and Revolution' appeared in the above monthly from July 1912 to March 1913 and were brought out in a book form with the title of the first lecture. Sister Devamata wrote a thougtful preface to the Lectures as follows: "There have been few minds in modern times more original or more undaunted in their search after Truth than was that of the Swami Ramakrishnananda. For him, the sweep of science was limited only by the boundary lines of creation and the consuming desire of his later years was to discover and make demonstrable the actual points of connection between the science of outer phenomenal world and of the inner realm of spirit, so that saint and scientist might join hands and recognize themselves as brothers. His highly developed intellect enabled him to analyse both Nature and Man into their finest constituent parts which his deep spiritual realisation made it possible for him to gather up all these parts into a new and ture unity. Wherever his thought rested, there came a flash of new understanding for all those with whom he shared it. His manner of teaching was child-like in its simplicity and unobtrusiveness, yet no one who had the blessed privilege of sitting in the dimly lighted hall of the Mylapore monastery at Madras listening to his profound words can ever forget the glow of satisfaction felt in the heart as he unfolded an ever deeper knowledge of the Universe and the Soul."

In the lecture on 'Search after Happiness' the Swami first points out that men on earth as well as gods in heaven all seek happiness outside through the senses. But happiness does not lie anywhere outside, it lies in the inermost core of our being. So to seek happiness one has to go inside oneself. "If you have the power to go inside yourself, then you have conquered the whole Universe. To go inside oneself means," he says, "to go away from earthly attachments that hold you down like a captive balloon. Though it is very very difficult to go inside, it is possible through either discrimination or devotion." By the second means it is easy to go inside and get eternal happiness, when in the words of the Swami, " you will be the happiest man in the whole universe. You will be like a little child. The father and mother are slaves to the baby. It may go anywhere without any feeling of care or responsibility, but they must always take care of it. So if you can become the baby of God you may be happier than even God Himself."

Swami Ramakrishnananda's lecture on 'Some Characteristic Features of Divine Incarnations' is excellent. His observations about a divine incarnation are particularly interesting since he had the blessed privilege of sitting at the feet of one such and serving him for three years. Naturally the question arises in the minds of the people, 'God being infinite, why and how does He incarnate?' In reply to this pertinent question the Swami says that man who has forgotten his infinite nature is finite. "If it is thus possible for man to be finite and infinite at the same time" says he, "how much more must it be possible for God to be so. An Incarnation of God, of course, has body and mind like man; but He has the power to separate Himself from body and mind easily. Sleep overpowers a man but never an Incarnation, who has mastery over His body, when awake; over his mind, when dreaming; over his consciousness when asleep. A Divine Incarnation is complete master of all his being in waking, dream and sleep. From the highest being down to a blade of grass all living organisms are a peculiar mixture of the Finite and Infinite. An Incarnation also is no exception to the rule." "But He only appears finite, though all the time Infinite," says the Swami. "Though he seems to be finite in power He is actually omnipotent. But few can recognise the perfect and divine nature of an Incarnation, so all treat Him as an ordinary being." The Swami further adds that man is consciously finite and unconsciously infinite, but an Incarnation of God is consciously infinite and unconsciously finite. The Swami then distinguishes an Incarnation from liberated or perfected souls. An Incarnation, being always perfect and never needing a teacher, without going to school or reading a book He is all-wise and omniscient. To see and serve Him is to see and serve God.

The Swami's lecture on evolution and revolution is thought-provoking. At first he gives in that lecture an idea of the materialistic monism of Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer and other western philosophers, and describes how in the struggle for existence higher and higher grade beings arise from amoeba to anthropoid ape, with a branch to man. The Swami points out that theirs is general evolution; for, individual evolution advocated by Kapila the Indian philosopher, is overlooked by them. The Swami thus points out the inadequacy of the western theory for not taking into consideration the case of the individual being. Kapila to whom evolution is an individual fact, not an universal fact, accepts both matter and spirit. According to him creation comes into being by the union of both and he explains it by the story of a lame man and a blind man. The lame man cannot walk, the blind man cannot see, but if the lame man can climb up on the blind man's shoulders both can go wherever they like. "The difference between Kapila's evolution and western evolution" the Swami remarks "is that while western evolution is an universal evolution and is imperfectly worked out, Kapila's evolution is individual and perfectly worked out. Kapila's evolution is really revolution. Like the bullock tied to the oil-press, who may walk nine or ten miles a day, yet does not go away from the oil-press but always remains in the same room; so we remain tied to nature in the same way. In nature, we find things not progressing, but going in a circle. In creation it is never evolution but always revolution." In the wheel of earthly life, the days, the months, the seasons, revolve in a circle. Kapila thinks that evolution is only of mind and body. But according to absolute idealism evolution is an illusion. "We must evolve as individuals" the Swami concludes "and the final end of all evolution is to realise that we are infinite, and not finite."

A lecture of Swami Ramakrishnananda on 'Wisdom and Devotion' appeared in *The Message of the East* for January, 1915 and was reprinted as a booklet from the Vedanta centre of Boston. In that lecture he defines wisdom as the effulgent condition of omniscience. "Wisdom" says the Swami "lives in the heart of every living being, but we do not perceive it, because the thick clouds of ignorance obscure it. The five sheaths of body, senses, mind, intellect and ego are the five clouds that hide the eternal wisdom that is within. Constant hankering to become omniscient proves beyond a shade of doubt that infinite wisdom resides in the heart of every man."

Showing the distinction between devotion and wisdom the Swami says, "Sri Ramakrishna used to illustrate their relation by the story of two fields, one higher than the other. The upper field is filled with water, the lower one is dry. The owner, to water the lower field, makes a channel through which the water flows. The water flows freely so long as the level of the water in the lower field, does not rise as high as that of the upper field. When the level is the same, the flow ceases and they become like one body of water. Then every ripple on the surface of one is communicated to the other. So it is with a true devotee. When he rises to the level of God the two become one and the same; and the waves of God's thoughts go through the mind of the devotee." "Our Master used to tell" he adds, "another story of three dolls, one of stone, one of cloth and the third of salt. All three were great friends. One day they wished to take a sea-bath. The first went into the ocean and came back unchanged. The second after going in could hardly drag itself out of the water and once on land it smelt of the sea, tasted of the sea and was all full of the sea-water. The third never came back. The first is the worldly man, the second is the devotee, who is full of divine love and bliss, and the third is the man of wisdom who merges his self in the Universal self." "As the devotee empties himself of himself," observes the Swami, "he is infilled with God".

"How to attain wisdom? If we throw away egoism", the Swami says, "we shall know that God and man are one. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that if we thrust a stick in water the water seems to be divided and we see a right-hand current and a left-hand current. But take the stick out, at once the water becomes one, and right-hand and left-hand divisions disappear. So are we. What makes us believe that we are not? It is the stick of ego thrust into the water of our mind which makes us think there are two currents—moral and immoral, good and bad, light and darkness, pleasure and pain. Take out the stick. Throw away the 'I'. If you can do it for one moment then you will know that you and God are one. This is what is called realisation or the state of superconsciousness. It is attained when the stick has been taken out and the current has become one. This is the goal of Jnana or the path of Wisdom." Describing the true attitude of a Jnani the Swami says, "The story is told that Maya, the personified creative force came one day to a Jnani or sage and said, 'Am I not very great? See, I have created so many worlds, suns and moons and stars. I am the ruler of such a vast universe.' 'You are the Queen of Zero' said the sage. Angry at the lack of regard for her greatness she touched him and he became a camel. He was put in the desert, made to carry heavy burdens over the hot sands and subjected to such cruel treatment that Maya herself at last had pity upon him and released him. Then she asked him if he would not now fall down and worship her. He only laughed saying, 'I have neither camel's body nor mind. You are not hurting me. You are only slapping your own cheek.' Maya exclaimed angrily, 'You are still incorrigible!' Again she touched him and this time made him an ass. As an ass he was beaten, forced to carry evil-smelling burdens, and to live a miserable existence. Then once more Maya came to him and asked him to bow down to her. 'Why should I? I am not suffering. The ass's body belongs to you not to me,' he replied. At last Maya seeing she could not disturb the serenity of his mind fell prostrate before him saying, 'It is you who are greater'.

Swami Ramakrishnananda's lecture on 'The True Self of Man' appeared in the *Message of the East* for July, 1914 and was reprinted as a booklet from the Vedanta Centre of Boston. At the very outset of the lecture the Swami points out that in order to realize the true self of man one has to give up all desires. It is the desires that ruffle the mind. He compares the mind to the surface of a lake which, if disturbed by waves and ripples, the trees and clouds and other objects are imperfectly mirrored in it; but if the surface is calm and clear, then every object is distinctly mirrored in it. "When the surface of the mind is calm and clear," the Swami observes, "the self is perfectly reflected." Next the Swami points out that, "desires cannot be quenched by satisfaction, but by dissociation. The more one yields to them the more they will burn him. When desires are extinguished, perfection which is within our being will be revealed. As the self resides within, every man is a temple of God. Wise men of the past realised this. They built these outer temples to show man how he must go from enclosure to enclosure of his being until in the innermost shrine he will find God seated." The Swami finishes his lecture with this description of the state of one who has realised his true self: "Nothing will ever be able to ruffle his mind. He may have to drudge under a hard taskmaster or he may be placed on a splendid throne, but he remains unmoved; because he knows that compared to that Light, this sun is but a flickering flame; compared to that Bliss these fleeting pleasures are as foolishness. Just as a farthing has no attraction for a millionaire, for to him it is as nothing, so the things of the world are as nothing to such a man; for he has found within himself an inexhaustible treasure, the treasure of enternal life, of infinite knowledge and unending bliss."

Swami Ramakrishnananda gave an address on 'Sri Ramakrishna and His Mission' on the occasion of the birth-anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna celebrated in 1900 at the Ice House on the South Beach Road of the city of Madras. The manuscript of the address was preserved by a devotee for about a decade and then published by P. R. Rama Iyer in 1910. The lecture in which many facts of the Master's life are condensed was reprinted in 1946 by the Madras Math.

In the latter part of 1947 another book by Swami Ramakrishnananda has been published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras. As a reviewer puts it, "Swami Ramakrishnananda in his book *God and Divine Incarnations*, takes the soul in its solitariness and gently leads it on to recognise its kinship with its Maker. His book is conceived and expressed in the spirit of the Upanishads. The god-less reality of formal science, and the unreal God of formal theology are alike left behind. Swamiji points out that the world comes not out of nothing, but from God. But if the Creator remains apart from his creation, we can never know Him. Hence the need for Divine Self-revelation in the form of Avataras and world-teachers.

" The second part of the book is a practical exposition of the general conclusions arrived at earlier. Bergson distinguishes in his *Two Sources of Morality and Religion* between the static and the dynamic. From his point of view all folk-lore may be regarded as the static aspect of religion. Much the same may be said of the various stories given in the *Bhagavata*, which may be regarded as poetical attempts at reconstruction. We may make them intellectually satisfying by allegorising them, but as all such allegorical interpretations are essentially subjective, there is no finality about them. Swamiji has followed a different method. He has tried to explain them in the light of the cosmic symbolism of the Chhandogya Upanishad.

" By piercing through the crust of tradition, he has liberated the dynamic spirit of religion, and in the lava flow of the spirit even what is hardened partially melts. The book is conceived and written in the spirit of *Brahmavada* with its stress upon earnest action

Swami Ramakrishnananda says that an Incarnation of God is one who lives in limitless consciousness."[1]

"Every one is really a Sannyasin for every one is constantly giving up in order to get happiness. There is not one who does not want to live and to be happy. Even the little ant is doing just what the greatest Yogi in a mountain cave is doing. What is it doing when it goes from one place to another? Is it not renouncing this place to go to that one? It comes to a grain of sand, stops and examines it, finds that it is not what it wants and gives it up to go in search of something better. So it moves on and on until it comes to a grain of sugar; then its journey ends for the time being, until hunger once more asserts itself. Thus it renounces one thing after another for something else. And how long will this little creature have to search? When will the final rest come for it? When will it be able to reach an infinite amount of sugar? Then no matter how often hunger may rise, it will always find satisfaction, and perfect happiness will be realised. That is, only when it comes in contact with an infinite amount of bliss will its journey stop. That infinite amount of bliss is God. The Yogi is searching after the same thing."—Thus runs a passage in *The Ancient Quest*, the latest book by Swami Ramakrishnananda[2] This book is a collection of a dozen lectures[3] by the Swami delivered during the years 1897 to 1910.

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[1] Vide *Triveni*-Vol. XIX, No. 6. January, 1948. pp. 363.

Those searches which had kept man ceaselessly going from the very morn of his life, those questions which had ever agonised his mind, those calls which had seated him on the chafing stallion of unrest riding ever from millennium to millennium, have been dealt with in this small book with that profundity of wisdom, the other name for which is *Realisation.* The originality displayed in the analysis of things and thoughts is *sui generis.* Even when the author is orthodox in his views, instead of being steriotyped, he is tremendously dynamic in spirit.

When direct vision of Truth imparts in one those convictions, of the stuff of which Truth itself is made, one has to become supraordinary. Swami Ramakrishnananda's *The Ancient Quest* gives the reader such an impression of the author's mind.

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[2] Published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras.

[3] They appeared proviously in the pages of *The Brahmavadin*, *The Prabuddha Bharata*, *The Vedanta Kesari* and *The Message of the East.*

CHAPTER XVI

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE ORDER

THE Contributions of Swami Ramakrishnananda to the growth and consolidation of the Ramakrishna Order, and to the neo-Vedantic movement, started by its founder, are very many. The Swami was a great apostle of the Order, and a builder of the world-wide organisation named after his Guru. He was not only the founder of the Mission in south India, but in a sense the founder of the entire Mission. For it was he who served the monastery in its early life as its Mother and took religious care of the remains of the Master for over a decade. In recognition of his devoted service to the cause, Swami Vivekananda said, " He was the 'main pillar' of the Math. Without him life in the monastery would have been impossible. Often the monks would be lost in prayer and meditation with no thought of food, and Sashi would wait with their meals ready, and even drag them out of their meditation.[1] He was the Mother of the monastery. In 1901, when Swami Vivekananda handed over the Belur Math to a registered body, he made Swami Ramakrishnananda one of the eleven original trustees of the Math. The latter held this trusteeship till the end of his life, that is, for about ten years. His dedicated life was an eternal source of inspiration to the devotees and monks of the Order and also to modern Hindus. And his books numbering about half a dozen are among the important publications of the Mission.

The Swami remains immortal in the Order for having instituted the ritual worship of the Master as the Guru, even against the wishes of his fellow-monks. Swami Vivekananda emphasised the impersonal aspect of the Master while Swami Ramakrishnananda emphasised his personal aspect. Thus a perfect balance between the personal and the impersonal aspects of the Ideal is maintained in the Order. To Swami Ramakrishnananda the Master was eternally present in the shrine in his spiritual body. Hence he must be served in the same way as when he was in flesh and blood. In the beginning of the Alambazaar Math, Swami Vivekananda objected to having a regular shrine, saying "We are homeless itinerant monks. We do not know where we shall be tomorrow and wherefrom our next meal will come. Let us not have a shrine of this type. Let us keep the ideal of the Master before us and build our life according to it." Swami Ramakrishnananda did not pay any heed to the objections of the leader and made up his mind to shoulder the responsibility himself. In those days several monks of the Math went out daily for begging but they could hardly get sufficient rice even for themselves. In their rounds of begging they were taunted and pitied by the people of the locality. Once during those hard days Swami Vivekananda sternly asked his fellow-monk, "Who will supply you with all this paraphernalia of worship and offering everyday?" Swami Ramakrishnananda could hardly brook such a ruthless remark and at once retorted saying, "Who is going to seek your help? The Lord will look after His own needs." During this period the Swami took up teaching in the Baranagore High School at noon for two hours. This he continued for about three months for the maintenance of the monastery and the ritual worship of the Master introduced by him. Swami Premananda describes the work of Swami Ramakrishnananda as follows at the Belur Math in December 1915, to the assembled monks and Brahmacharins, "What a great hero of action Swami Ramakrishnananda was! Emulate his example. In fact, he and none of us, is the founder of the Math, and its shrine. I can proclaim emphatically that he is the creator of all this. In the Alambazaar Math, all including Swamiji, raised strong objections to regular worship of the Master, but Sashi Maharaj placed the Master's picture on a torn mat and worshipped. One day Swamiji and other fellow-monks went away to the house of Balaram Bose as a protest against Sashi Maharaj's running of a shrine. Sashi Maharaj alone stuck to his guns in the Math and conducted the worship. Next day Balaram Babu persuaded them to return to the Math. During Sashi Maharaj's time the worship of the Master was done in a more elaborate way such as the offering of the green tooth-stick finely softened. Now that offering is made mentally and some other details have been omitted." [2]

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[1] Vide *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 604.

Swami Ramakrishnananda was therefore the originator of the Ramakrishna Cult which is the concrete form of the spirit for which the Order stands. The Master himself said once in an ecstatic mood that he would be present in his spiritual body wherever his disciples should instal him. This has been verified by many and the Master, being the presiding deity of the monastery, he should be served and worshipped as when he was in his physical form. Hence the introduction of the worship was the desideratum of the Order. The direct disciples of the Master were of course capable of understanding and practising the impersonal ideal. But the younger generation of monks that followed them and thousands of lay devotees of various levels of mind should have a concrete ideal before them. Hence the Ramakrishna Cult came into being out of a historical necessity and became popular. Guided by God, Swami Ramakrishnananda introduced this cult into the Order, with such wonderful results that thousands of men and women, young and old, educated and illiterate, have been able to put into practice the new perfection, the modern synthesis lived and taught by the Master. For the inmates of the monastery this cult is the easiest way of spiritualising life. When a monk or Brahmacharin thinks that the Master lives in the monastery, or a devotee believes that the Master is the presiding deity of his home, his outlook is easily changed and his daily life is slowly transformed.

Swami Ramakrishnananda realised this and so he dedicated his life to the establishment of the cult in the Order. A room is set apart as a shrine in every centre where the Master has been invoked to live, move and have his being. There he is worshipped and offered food and served just as a living being. Swami Ramakrishnananda formulated a detailed system of worship and compiled suitable mantras from the scriptures.

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[2] Vide '*Premananda*' Part I., (p. 111.) a Bengali work by Swami Omkareswarananda, Calcutta.

This method of worship is followed in all centres of the Order as in the Belur Math. The Manuscript containing this ritual worship was written very carefully with his own hand, and is still preserved in the Belur Math.

Such worship makes the worshipper full of Ramakrishna and leads him to realise that Sri Ramakrishna is human form of the supreme Being, an Incarnation of God. The adoration and meditation of his personal aspect will slowly reveal to the worshipper his impersonal aspect. That is why Swami Ramakrishnananda stressed the importance of worshipping Sri Ramakrishna as a personal God, living and moving as man. As the goddess Kali was worshipped by Sri Ramakrishna, so was Sri Ramakrishna worshipped by his devoted disciple Ramakrishnananda. The Ramakrishna Order has accepted the system of Ramakrishna-Puja practised by the Swami.

Swami Ramakrishnananda had himself compiled the whole process of initiation into *Brahmacharya* from ancient scriptures and the Ramakrishna Order adopted the same for the Brahmacharins as preparatory to the Vedic ceremony of *Sannyasa*. The mantras and vows, composed in beautiful classical Sanskrit are very different in spirit and form from the *Upanaya* ceremony. Swami Ramakrishnananda was the originator of the ceremony now followed. The order is therefore indebted to the Swami for the systematisation and introduction of the *Brahmacharya* ceremony and the ritual worship of Sri Ramakrishna among other things.

Let us now conclude this sketch of the life of Swami Ramakrishnananda with the loving tribute of Swami Shivananda, the second President of the Ramakrishna Order. This was written on the 11th Dec., 1927, from Benares.

" Swami Ramakrishnananda was the true personification of love and purity. Such purity, both of mind and body, I have yet to see. His love and devotion for Sri Ramakrishna, the ideal and goal of his life, knew no bounds. They can be compared favourably only with that of Hanuman for Sri Ramachandra. His love and affection for his gurubhais, Swami Vivekananda and Swami Brahmananda, and others, whom he used to take as parts and parcel of Sri Ramakrishna, bordered on worship. With him there was no distinction between high and low, rich and poor. He was solicitous for everyone's welfare. He would receive all with open arms and give them all he had. He sacrificed himself on the altar of sacred duty—which was to worship the Master in all beings and help them to realise the Divine within. He himself would scrupulously observe what he wanted others to follow. He came into this world for Sri Ramakrishna and served Him with his whole heart and soul and returned back to Him. Swami Vivekananda appropriately gave him the name of Ramakrishnananda.

He was the staunchest, nay, the most orthodox devotee of Sri Guru Maharaj. He knew nothing else. He was full of Him. His life, influence and whole-hearted work in Southern India is the foundation on which all are building now. People will appreciate him more and more, day by day."

FINIS

"ALL those who approached Sri Ramakrishna Deva had some ulterior motive or other. They had asked 'How shall I be saved?', 'How shall I progress in Spiritual Life?' or 'How shall I walk in the path of Yoga?'. But Sashi (Swami Ramakrishnananda) had no such motive whatsoever. He surrendered his humble self completely to the Master and learnt only the religion of self-

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